CULTURE, DISCOURSE, AND THE WORKPLACE

Culture, Discourse, and the Workplace adds new theoretical and methodological insights into the complex relationship between language, culture, and identity in professional settings. Examining the politics of language use at work and via a critical sociolinguistic approach, this book:

- Utilises three case studies from institutional and business contexts to provide a unique illustration of participants' roles and negotiating membership within the business meeting;
- Questions essentialist meanings of culture and the ways in which they constitute a powerful resource for employees to perpetuate or challenge the status quo in their professional setting;
- Includes a core section on methodology for the workplace discourse researcher as well as a section dedicated to FAQs and a worked example on data analysis;
- Provides future directions for Workplace Sociolinguistics as a field and makes a case for holistic research and multidisciplinary enquiry.

Culture, Discourse, and the Workplace constitutes a key resource for students and teachers of Intercultural Communication and ESP and will also be of significant interest to researchers in the fields of workplace studies and business interaction.

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CULTURE, DISCOURSE, AND THE WORKPLACE

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FOREWORD

Workplace discourse research has developed dramatically since the seminal work of Drew and Heritage in 1992 (*Talk at Work*), and we are well overdue for a book that critically reviews this development. Jo Angouri takes on this challenge in *Culture, Discourse, and the Workplace*, as well as contributing to our understanding of the complex relationship between language and culture in professional settings. Adopting a sociolinguistic approach, the book's unique contribution to theory and methodology in the area of workplace discourse research lies in her perceptive exploration of the politics of language use at work.

I first met Jo Angouri when she came to visit the Language in the Workplace Project (LWP) team in 2006. We were greatly impressed by her enthusiastic and proactive approach to research and to developing research networks, as well as her evident commitment to interdisciplinary cooperation. Since then, as an energetic LWP Research Associate, she has engaged in a number of joint initiatives with team members, including a book, *Negotiating Boundaries at Work*, which explores how employees discursively manage workplace transitions, based on a conference panel at the Sociolinguistics Symposium held in Berlin.

Our most recent research explores the influence of ethnicity and the tacit 'culture order' on discourse patterns, and this monograph aligns well with that work. Jo adopts the social constructionist approach to analysis that characterises all our work, and applies it to provide insights into the way politics plays a part in business meetings, as well as the complexities of the ways in which culture and language intertwine in ongoing interaction. Organisations themselves are analysed as discursive constructs and the wide-ranging effects of the pervasive tendency to position participants as 'us' vs 'them' is laid out in fascinating detail. While the dominant paradigm is Interactional Sociolinguistics, principles of Critical Discourse Analysis and Conversation Analysis are also employed to provide further insights in the rich analyses provided in this excellent book.

Culture, Discourse, and the Workplace provides an insightful critical perspective on the myriad definitions of culture that can be found in the literature, as well as the many different frameworks that have been adopted in researching the relationship between language and culture. Scholars and students alike will find the early chapters a valuable guide in beating a path through the thickets of different epistemological approaches, and gaining an understanding of the influence of various political systems on the way our workplaces are structured. Later chapters provide a readable and practical guide on how to go about doing discourse analysis of workplace interaction, including a meticulous description of the participatory, ethnographic approach and detailed analysis of well-chosen excerpts from three case studies which illustrate how participants 'do' identity and culture in the workplace and how organisational power relations are enacted in meetings. Particularly valuable is the author's perceptive discussion of the role of a researcher as political, unavoidably involving ideological choices in relation to the issues, participants, and organisations selected as the focus of the research.

I am confident readers will find this book a rich source of insight on different approaches to discourse analysis as well as a practical guide to doing language in the workplace research. And by demonstrating its value, Jo Angouri makes a convincing case for more multidisciplinary, holistic, and critical approaches to workplace research.

by Janet Holmes

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1

INTRODUCTION

Talking 'culture'[1] at work

The modern workplace is international, multilingual, and diverse and employees are expected to work in teams and to operate at the interface of linguistic, professional, and geographical boundaries. Transitions between jobs, countries, professions, and time zones are common and this requires managing multiple different norms and ways of doing work. This complex work environment is linguistically enacted and involves an ongoing meaning negotiation between the individual and the community. In this context, this volume aims to unpack the complex relationship between language and culture in the workplace, focusing on the ways in which individuals negotiate organisational practice in daily routines at work. Special attention is paid to the relationship between ideology and essentialist meanings of culture as emerging in interaction. The discussion is grounded in the field of workplace discourse and draws on research in Critical Sociolinguistics, Applied Linguistics, and Intercultural Communication. My interest in *workplace interaction*, *research in sensitive fields,* and *critical sociolinguistics* is reflected in the set-up and organisation of the volume.

The volume is organised in three parts and nine chapters. The first part – Part 1 (Chapters 2 and 3) – aims to set the scene and provides a discussion of the theoretical framework that underpins the arguments put forward. The discussion of the literature is aimed at the informed reader but not a specialist, and the text provides references to relevant sources. The chapters are addressed to both those familiar with the field and also to those who come from a different disciplinary background and intend to either undertake research or to provide training and consultancy.

Part 2 (Chapters 4 and 5) is concerned with theoretical and methodological issues, relevant when designing and carrying out research in the workplace. Turning to the third part – Part 3 (Chapters 6, 7, and 8) – data from three different organisational settings are discussed. This part forms the empirical heart of the book and provides an insight into how organisations in general and professionals in particular talk themselves into being (Heritage, 2011); through this process professional roles

in a range of organisational practices are enacted. The closing chapter (Chapter 9) provides a synthesis and paves the way for research in areas where gaps have been identified. The following two sections of the introduction provide a brief insight into/overview of the field of workplace discourse and the core theoretical stances I adopt and refer the reader to the relevant chapters where the various points are discussed in detail.

1.1 The field of workplace discourse

Despite the significance of the workplace for both individuals and societies as a whole, linguists in general, and sociolinguists and applied linguists in particular have relatively recently turned their attention to it as a research setting. The field grew exponentially in the 80s and the 90s drawing on work already in place in Sociology and, later, (Discursive) Psychology and Conversation Analysis (CA) (see also Clift, 2016) paradigm (see Section 4.3).

Conversation Analysts turned to institutional talk (see Cameron, 2001: 162 for a discussion of the term; Drew and Heritage, 1992; Boden and Zimmerman, 1991) around the 70s and significant work saw the light of day in the 90s (e.g., Drew and Heritage, 1992; Heritage, 1995). The majority of studies were concerned with the frontstage encounters involving professionals and service users, what Sarangi and Roberts call the public face of the workplace (1999a: 21). This provided the field with a good understanding of the features and architecture of talk in a range of professional settings. More recently, studies broadened the remit of the enquiry and a whole range of terms were introduced into academic jargon to indicate affiliation to different theoretical and methodological traditions in the analysis of interaction. These typically attempt to go beyond the sequential architecture of conversation which has been the canonical focus of CA work. Terms such as 'professional discourse', 'discourse in the professions', 'business discourse' (and variants) are used to differentiate the early studies and those which are focused on research of the frontstage from those that study the backstage, where all the participants are in their work setting (see Sarangi and Roberts, 1999a: 22 for an extensive discussion).[1]

Sociolinguists also started engaging with the workplace as a research setting from the 70s onwards. The work of John Gumperz and the *interactional sociolinguistic* (IS) approach to the analysis of social interaction is particularly relevant to the concerns of workplace discourse analysts (Section 4.3). John Gumperz's research focused on the analysis of (intercultural) encounters. His systematic and influential work brought to the fore issues of miscommunication as well as the negative social evaluations projected on the individual when expectations of linguistic behaviour are not met. IS shares with CA a focus on the detailed analysis of interaction. Unlike CA however, it places this in its wider socio–cultural context. It is influenced by ethnography and seeks to understand the situation through the participants' eyes. It is interpretive and draws on the researcher's analysis and understanding of the context. IS has been widely used in workplace sociolinguistic research and it is the approach I have adopted and fully discuss later on. IS provides the tools to unpack

contextual presuppositions that figure in hearers' inferences of speakers' meaning (Schiffrin, 1994: 105) and as such connect the moment of the interaction with its societal context.

Outside the immediate remit of CA and IS, the 90s saw a meteoric rise in the number of studies on, broadly put, workplace discourse (written and spoken). Drawing on the analysis of language as used in different settings, this work attempted to capture the subtle negotiation of meaning between the speakers in professional contexts and contributed to establishing the field within other discourse analytic approaches. And it is at that time that linguists start drawing on developments in organizational theory, sociology, and business studies but the connections were, and still are, patchy. Bargiela-Chiappini (2009) provides an excellent overview of how the interest in business discourse brings together (and separates) scholars from various disciplinary areas.

This early work has been particularly influential and provided the underpinning for what is now seen as an established field drawing on theory and method from Sociolinguistics and Applied Linguistics. To name but few, Clyne's work (1994) has been particularly significant for the development of a line of enquiry in workplace interaction. Clyne drew on the analysis of audio recorded data and focused on the interactions between multilingual staff in blue collar positions in Australia. His work showed the complexity of the linguistic environment and the importance of pragmatic norms in the way things are done at work. Gumperz and Roberts (1991) also addressed the multiple skills involved in 'successful' interaction (see also Sarangi and Roberts, 1999; Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Boden, 1994), and Wodak (2012) made a case for the workplace as a site of struggle where power hierarchies are negotiated, perpetuated, and (sometimes successfully) challenged and resisted. Following the agenda Hymes introduced in the 70s, all this work underlined the significance of pragmatic norms for communication and the limitations of understanding language as a mere set of rules. From a sociolinguistics perspective, Holmes's work (e.g., Holmes and Stubbe, 2003; Holmes et al., 2011) has had significant conceptual and methodological impact on the development of the field. Her work on the relationship between language use and social structure in the workplace as well as on power and politeness, the gender order and more recently the culture order (Holmes, forthcoming) has led to a number of studies on public and private enterprises and provided the field with a robust analytical framework. The New Zealand Language in the Workplace project has been and remains a significant resource for anybody interested in workplace studies. Holmes's work has influenced both a number of workplace discourse analysts and ESP professionals in using interactional data in the classroom (Holmes et al., 2011).

Further on the ESP and Applied Linguistic front: this line of enquiry is often not placed under the workplace discourse umbrella, which however I consider an ideological decision more than anything else. It is important for the diversity in the field and the potential for further cross-fertilisation between studies under, traditionally put, Sociolinguistics and Applied Linguistics. Teaching language for business purposes and identifying the needs of employees seeking work in a new country

or context have been and are still addressed under the Language (broadly) or English (more narrowly) for Specific Purposes fields (ESP/LSP). The developments in Communicative Language teaching and the debates on syllabi for adult learners have drawn considerable attention and are still reflected in current scholarship (e.g., Serafini et al., 2015). Already in the 80s and 90s (e.g., Hutchinson and Waters, 1987), research foregrounded the dynamic nature of language needs for work purposes, put emphasis on the complexity of the 'target situation', and contributed to bringing the classroom closer to workplace practice. Scholars also focused on materials used in the classroom environment and addressed the mismatch between language used in the classroom and naturally occurring talk. The early research on textbook material (e.g., Williams, 1988) is significant in making a case for opening the classroom to business practice and helping the learner to go beyond set materials (Angouri, 2009). This line of enquiry is well established in Applied Linguistics and remains topical given the international character of the modern workplace and the significance of language for integration and career development. The opening of the classroom to the way organisations operate (Bargiela-Chiappini and Zhang, 2013) and the attempt to bring language teaching closer to other fields of enquiry were beneficial for the use of diverse and mixed method approaches to the designing of materials and learning activities. In recent years, practitioners and researchers alike have called for greater dialogue between those who teach and those who research workplace talk (e.g., Chan, 2009; Bremner, 2010; Bowles, 2006). Despite the interest from both groups, there is still only limited interaction. Bao (2013) makes a convincing claim for a constant dialogue between textbook material and real life, so that the materials designer allows space for 'writer–user interaction'. This interaction can clearly be facilitated by dialogue between researchers and practitioners. Yet, time and again research shows that teaching resources and classroom practices continue to be at odds with the reality of the workplace (see Chan, 2009; Riddiford and Newton, 2010). This underscores the potential as well as the need for multidisciplinarity, a theme I revisit throughout the volume.

Overall, workplace discourse studies vary in both theoretical positioning and the ways in which data is analysed. However, there is agreement that talking work is *doing* work (Section 3.7). The inseparable bond between talk and action is not new for linguists (the work on speech acts is well known to the anticipated readers of this book) and in the context of the workplace, the employees negotiate their own and others' professional and social selves while also constructing or resisting powerful ideologies which shape and are shaped in every workplace setting (Section 3.2). Further work however is still needed to focus on how employees negotiate ways of doing and how this become (or not) dominant in their work setting (see conclusions).

1.2 From culture to metacultural; theoretical affinities and overall aims

This book takes a critical sociolinguistic approach to the study of interaction and is influenced by the post-structuralist (Chapter 2) agenda. Post structuralism puts

emphasis on the multifaceted relationship between language and culture. The widely cited linguistic/cultural turn (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000) in Social Sciences is a good illustration as it is concerned with discourse as social practice (Chapter 3) and explores the dynamic relationship between the individual and the group – or the agency of the individual in relation to structures and dominant ideologies in their context. This is also apparent in current scholarship in workplace discourse, which has moved away from seeing culture and language as distinct, fixed, or stable *things*.

Further, workplace discourse analysts have had a strong interest in 'culture' since the beginnings of the field and particularly in its complex relationship with language. Language, in the field, is seen as social, situated, and political. It is understood as diachronically and synchronically evolving and negotiated between users in different contexts and domains of human activity. Simultaneously, the thinking around the concept of 'culture' followed a similar trajectory. From linearity and positivism, recent work focuses on the constructed and negotiated *ways of doing* that distinguish communities. Moving away from a macro, top–down approach, which was concerned with the essence of phenomena, recent work focuses on fluidity and complexity. Language and culture are commonly seen as practices, performed in organisational settings. In this context, the ontological boundaries between language and culture become fuzzy and it is debatable whether they actually exist or not.

While the ontological differences between the two concepts are difficult to delimit, and not an exercise I am interested in (see in Sharifian, 2011), in line with the linguistic anthropology tradition I see language as the "principal, exemplar medium, and site of the cultural" (Silverstein, 2004: 622). I take take a practice approach and I am interested in the dynamics of interaction in the local context. I align with the work that argues for a shift from *culture* to *the cultural* (e.g., Dhamoon, 2006) to mark a focus on the process of meaning negotiation in the situated space of interaction. This shift puts emphasis on the individual without ignoring the importance of dominant meanings that pre-exist a specific moment in the *here and now* of talk. Interactants draw on recourses beyond the immediate discourse context to make meaning from what is said (or not) in a workplace event. Any interaction draws on conventions assumed as shared, given or agreed upon as well as on individual stances and meanings that participants put forward. I discuss the theoretical issues related to this position later on (Chapter 4).

It is important to clarify from the outset that I am not using the term 'cultural' as an adjective describing the properties or traits of a 'culture'. To the contrary I take a processual stance and see *cultural* as pertinent to the interactional work we all *do* in a particular socio-political and historical context. So by analogy to Street's (1993) 'culture as a verb', I see *cultural* as better suited to focus on the agency of the speaker and the significance of power negotiation in a given context. To push further this agenda, I prefer the use of the term *metacultural (discourse)* to emphasise the process of meaning negotiation and dissociate from the strong connotations of homogeneity and stability that come with the everyday use of the 'cultural'.

I see metacultural discourse as *situated* and *emergent*, *negotiated* by participants in workplace events which are historically conditioned and embedded in a particular socio-political context. I argue that the concept of 'culture' in its range and potential for *essentialised meanings*, is *a resource* mobilised to explain and justify the positions claimed/projected by the speaker and the relationship with the social order. Interactants take a reflexive stance and draw on dominant meanings available to them in constructing professional roles and identities. By using the term 'metacultural' I provide a lens that allows us to engage with what people do when essentialist meanings of culture are made relevant.

Through the data discussed in Chapter 8, I draw on interaction and aim to discuss:

a) how shared practice and meaning is negotiated in the here and now of interaction as an ongoing process. And the ways in which employees talk the organisation into being (Heritage, 2005) while also negotiating their professional roles and areas of responsibility. Examining this process draws attention to the multiple and interacting systems of meaning available to the employees in any given setting.

b) the form and function of essentialist meanings of culture when topicalised in interaction. This looks into the ways in which metacultural discourse emerges, is interactionaly achieved and becomes a resource in the context of the participants. This involves meta-talk in business events as well as in interview contexts where the employees co-produce narratives for and with the researcher.

I align with the critical sociolinguistic tradition and the approach and frameworks I draw upon prioritise the perception of the speaker over that of the analyst's. These two positions are well discussed in the literature under 'first' vs. 'second' order terms. I expand on this further in later sections.

1.3 First and second order approaches to culture

The use of the term 'culture' – and coterminous notions – is so extended that it is difficult to imagine what is not or cannot be covered under its remit. The term comes up frequently in academic literature and everyday discourses and is used as shorthand for a whole spectrum of meanings and behaviours. The ways in which lay people and experts engage with abstract concepts and/or phenomena correspond to different conceptual universes and analytical spaces and as such they have attracted significant attention in Social Sciences.

In fact, already in 1953, Schutz, and the ensuing ethnomethodological tradition (see e.g., Garfinkel, 1967), raises the problem; the mismatch between the common-sense orientation of a group's first order constructs and the second order constructs of the (social) scientist. Schutz writes: "The thought objects constructed by the social scientists refer to and are founded upon the thought objects constructed by

the common-sense thought of man [sic] living his [sic] everyday life among his fel-lowmen [sic]" (1953: 3). Others have also elaborated on this distinction, and the role of the analyst claiming a value free, neutralistic stance (first order) or a value laden position (see for instance Friedrichs's [1970] account on the priestly vs. prophetic position of the sociologist).

In relation to the 'culture' theoretical meander, Sewell (2005) correctly notes that theories of culture often blur the two spheres without systematically addressing that the lay user and the analyst have different agendas and goals. Hence, unless we agree on what it is we are talking about, theories of culture "are strictly speaking, incommensurate: they refer to different conceptual universes" (2005: 157). And he continues "one must have a clear conception of culture at this abstract level in order to deal with the more concrete theoretical questions of how cultural differences are patterned and bounded in space and time" (2005: 157). I agree with Sewell on the need for distinguishing between the different conceptualisations of the term as well as on the importance of theoretical clarity. This debate is well known yet seldom raised in workplace socio/linguistic analyses of professional interaction in general and in relation to culture talk.

Turning to sociolinguistics, it is axiomatic that ordinary people's perceptions and the lived experience is central to the enquiry. Note for instance how one of the founding figures of the field, William Labov, criticises "the priesthood of theoretical linguistics and its reliance on idealised linguistic data" (Coupland, 2007: 42) while making an explicit commitment to 'secular linguistics' (Coupland, 2007: 4) and the study of ordinary people's language use. The very notion of folklinguistics (e.g., Niedzielski and Preston, 2000), referring to non-linguists' beliefs about language, indexes the field's acknowledgment of the significance of everyday beliefs about language.

At the same time, folk beliefs of language use are noted to be persistently resist-ant to sociolinguistic evidence. Research on gender and language is a particularly good illustration of this. Despite years of researchers fighting against stereotypi-cal representations of wo/men's behaviours, a quick search on 'gender differences' shows that the wo/man binary is still popular in the social imaginary. Linguistic research has been arguing on the nuances and complexities of social categorisa-tion for quite some time now, but the discourse of difference has been resilient to change.

So the complex relationship between "folklinguistic stereotype and linguis-tic fact" (Cameron, 1992: 42) as well as the unattainable utopia of the neutral research and value free analyses (see also Section 4.2 on the politics of interpreta-tion) has led to useful theorisation in the field. Work on indexicality (Silverstein, 2003; Johnstone, 2010) for instance has shown the dynamics of second order meanings and also politeness theory (see e.g., Watts et al., 1992; Eelen, 2001) and pragmatics (e.g., Haug, 2012) have long engaged with ~~how to best engage~~ with the analyst's vs. speaker(s)' interpretation of the speech event. The first/second order concepts have been heavily and usefully debated in those areas. It is also

an issue well debated in relation to emic (insider) and etic (outsider) accounts of data. This in itself is interesting and may be useful to take stock on critically engaging with the Intercultural Communication (ICC) theoretical apparatus that has been developed over the years. In this volume, however, I seek to go beyond disconnects between the uses of the term 'culture' per se – which I understand as different conceptual levels.

Further to this, the 'first and second order' distinction is not only applicable in the researcher/participant understanding of an event/phenomenon but also for changes in footing when either or both the researcher and/or the participant take a reflexive stance and (co)construct an account of their experiences. Overall, meta-talk about abstract notions has been a convenient and useful way for researchers to elicit data on perceptions. This 'meta' conversation however is, in itself, *discourse* in and through which the participants *do* construct self and other in the narratives elicited *for and with* the researcher. My intention here is not to perpetuate binaries between 'the researcher' and 'the user' which are static and rigid. Both parties, the researcher and the researched, are involved in iterative first order observation and second order reflection of phenomena. In the life cycle of any research project for instance, these positions are negotiated in the different events where researchers and participants negotiated shard meanings. Equally important, second order theories and tools spread into the first order and provide a language for deconstructing and reconstructing experience. Metacultural discourse is a case in point as I argue in Section 6.1 and technical (academic) jargon mainly associated with a particular strand of ICC research is by now widely used in professional settings.

These multiple levels of interpretation are significant for the development and use of our theoretical and methodological apparatus in workplace discourse research.

Figure 1.1 provides a starting point which is further elaborated in later sections of the volume (Chapter 4).

To sum up, the study of culture, and theorisation around it (second order), have generated and became subject to a number of binaries: such as the individual/group, self/other, structure/agency, as well as in epistemological and methodological approaches e.g., researcher/user, essentialism/constructionism, quantitative/qualitative tools, self-reported data/ethnographically informed approaches. I address those in detail later. I argue from the outset that there is no one correct culture theory or *passe-partout* of all questions. In drawing on first order and second order use and multiple conceptualisations of the term, I discuss the analytical value associated with 'culture' and how it is used by researchers and lay people in business contexts.

Theories and methodologies constitute tools employed by researchers in the process of accessing and studying multifaceted phenomena and they do not carry value outside the context of their use. In the current climate where there is a call for more multidisciplinary work, it becomes all the more important to take stock and reflect on the challenges that are associated with the established tools and approaches in our field.
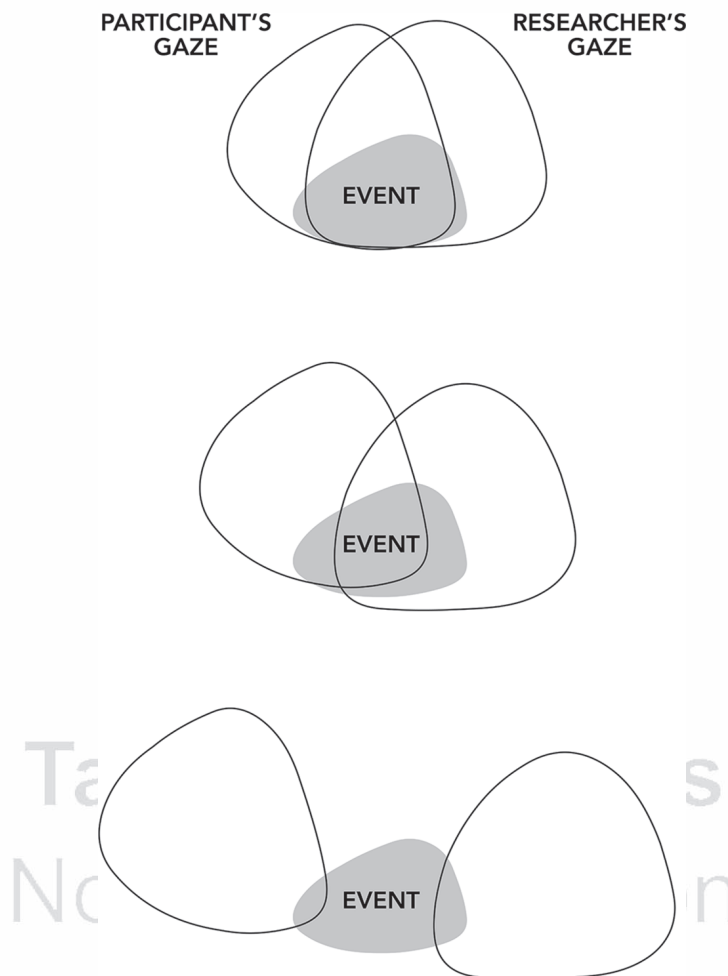
FIGURE 1.1   The researcher's and participant's understanding of phenomena

1.4 Workplace discourse in the post-disciplinary era

Workplace linguists have been interested in the ways employees negotiate belonging and index group membership, or the opposite, in daily life at work and the ways in which ideologies are made relevant in the way we behave linguistically when we work together. This has implications for claiming, and being accepted, or not, as 'one of us'. Culture, in its different meanings is directly relevant to this process and as such it has been prominent in past and current work. At the same time, ICC, often branded as a distinct field, has produced different schools of thought within its own boundaries. Those who see ICC as a field also see it as a young one. I only partly share this view as *culture* (and the *intercultural*) has been addressed under different theoretical traditions and paradigms in most disciplines in social sciences and humanities.

Disciplinary boundaries and the ways in which we categorise academic activity have been, of course, important for the development of research fields. Theoretical and methodological affiliations provide tools and a metalanguage for the analysis of

complex phenomena. This has served our research agendas and has provided insights into questions around culture, identity, and society. It is, however, problematic to assume that fields and disciplines are inherently distinct. Disciplinary boundaries and loyalties can be, at times, all that separates different scholars and their object of enquiry. This becomes particularly problematic if it negatively impacts collaboration and cross-fertilisation in research. Research on language and culture is a case in point. Specifically, the relationship between those who self-identify as working in the ICC field and other neighbouring areas, notably Sociolinguistics, Linguistic Anthropology, and Applied Linguistics, has been and still is erratic. For a field that focuses on communication, the channels between the different areas of interest are, ironically, blocked or non-existent. It is my belief that rigid boundaries between paradigms, methodologies, or experts, practitioners and lay participants restrain our ability to address complex questions holistically. And although this volume reflects my own disciplinarily loyalties and affiliations, I align with those who make a case for a need to rethink the limitations of disciplinary boundaries and probe our vocabulary and theoretical tools for carrying out research in the postmodern era. I return to this point at the very end of the volume.

Turning to theory, there are many iterations of the conceptualisation of culture in Sociolinguistic and Applied Linguistic research and almost as many attempts to capture them. The following two chapters critically discuss and synthesise work on how the notions of language, culture, and identity interact theoretically and with relevance to the workplace context but do not provide exhaustive lists of definitions which by now are well covered and discussed in other work (e.g., Zhu, 2011; Jackson, 2014; Sharifian, 2011). Instead they pave the way for zooming in three cases in Part 3 and the overall conclusions that can be drawn through this enquiry.

Note

1 Inverted commas indicate multiple readings of a term. I am refraining from using them excessively as it can become tiresome for the reader. In all cases 'culture' has multiple meanings, but I am only emphasising the ambiguity of the notion when not clear from the text.

PART I

A prismatic view of culture

The concept of culture has long preoccupied researchers in the social sciences and humanities. Definitions of what it *is* have proliferated in the literature and scholars have debated how it can be best captured and analysed. More recently, and under the postmodern paradigm (Section 2.8) in particular, a static, universalistic under-standing of culture has come under scrutiny. Instead of using culture to refer to something we all 'have', researchers have turned to what people *do* and how culture is locally negotiated and constructed. This concept of doing is central in the volume and will be discussed from different angles (Section 2.13).

The term 'culture' is commonly referred to as complex and multidimensional. It is less clear however what exactly researchers and theorists alike mean by *complex* and *multidimensional*. And while there is consensus on the difficulties associated with the connotation of the term, 'culture' is widely used by researchers and lay people alike in contexts ranging from 'women's culture' to 'British culture' to 'western cul-ture' 'meeting culture', 'sports culture', and so on. Part 1 aims to take a closer look at the concept's theoretical trajectory by mainly drawing on perspectives that cor-respond broadly to work in four disciplines: Anthropology, Linguistics, Psychology, and Sociology. Work in anthropology and sociology has contributed greatly in look-ing into societal norms and structures. Psychology has made a major contribution to the theories of identity and Linguistics has addressed the relationship between the structure, society, and language use. In line with the disciplinary orientation of the volume, this literature is read primarily from a workplace discourse perspective in Chapter 1. I then turn to the modern workplace and focus on its multilingual nature and dominant discourses on commodification of skills and competences. The relationship between language, culture, power, and identity occupies a central position throughout the book and the discussion provides the foundation for what follows and a rationale for the positioning adopted in the writing.

Proof

2

CULTURE, POWERFUL METAPHORS, AND COTERMINOUS NOTIONS

The term 'culture' can mean very much or very little depending on the context within which the term is used. It has a long history and roots in different disciplines and schools of thought. Hence, there is a large number of definitions one can easily find and which have been painstakingly collected and contrasted by a range of scholars. Jandt (2004: 6) for instance uses the 'battlefield' metaphor to capture the variation in the ways the term has been operationalised. And Kroeber's 1952 work (and in Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952) is also widely cited for returning about 164 different definitions of the term. Reproducing and listing the many definitions is unnecessary, it is useful though to take a closer look at key constructs and the associated epistemological traditions and as such illustrate the conceptual development of thinking in the area.

In many cases technical terms and theories of culture became powerful metaphors, spread from the realm of academia to first order discourses and back. Culture shock (Section 2.2), cultural national attributes (Section 2.5), or global culture (Section 2.9) are good examples of this which I address later on. Instead of moralising them as good or bad or right and wrong, I see them as attempts to separate the 'figure' from the 'ground' and worthy of discussion. In order to place those constructs in their context, however, it is important to look into their epistemological environment. In this chapter I discuss positivism, essentialism, constructionism, and critical approaches to language and culture. The purpose is to connect terminology with the wider thinking in social sciences, provide a rationale for my own positioning in the critical constructionist school and to also contextualise my tack on methodological issues that follow in Part 2. I have organised this part of the book under rubrics prefaced by 'Culture as' or 'Culture in'. The sections dealing with epistemological issues are highlighted for ease of reading.

2.1 *Culture* as a (quantifiable) set of attributes that distinguish one group from another

Culture has been commonly operationalised as a social macro category (same as age, gender, ethnicity, and so on) and indexed through a range of features or behaviours that are shared between the members of large or smaller collectivities.

This line of thinking is well represented in the literature. Research designs and methodologies aim to capture behaviours that can be measured and contrasted, typically through quantitative tools. Features, traits or attitudes that are projected to a group as a whole are then organised in what has been famously termed as 'dimensions' of culture or 'mental programmes' (Hofstede, 1994: 14) that distinguish one group from another. Cross-cultural psychology has and is still influential in producing theories and tools aiming at measuring and contrasting groups and has influenced work in broadly put workplace socioinguistics studies and ICC.

The notion of layers is commonly used to describe 'culture' in this context, and metaphors of objects with interconnected and hidden parts are typical in the relevant literature. In particular, representations of onions, icebergs, salads, and flowers are commonly adopted in an attempt to represent the complexity of the notion. As an illustration, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner are widely cited for distinguishing between outer (explicit) and inner (implicit) layers of culture with the former being the readily observable and the latter being hidden or difficult to reach. The Figure 2.1 provides a summary of the visualisation of the metaphoric images which has been discussed by a range of researchers (plenty of overviews are available– see e.g., Spencer-Oatey, 2002).

The notion of culture as a multilayered entity is deeply entrenched in academic work and scholars distinguish between the layers that are related to the individual, those relevant to larger units such as an organisation, a society, or a whole country.
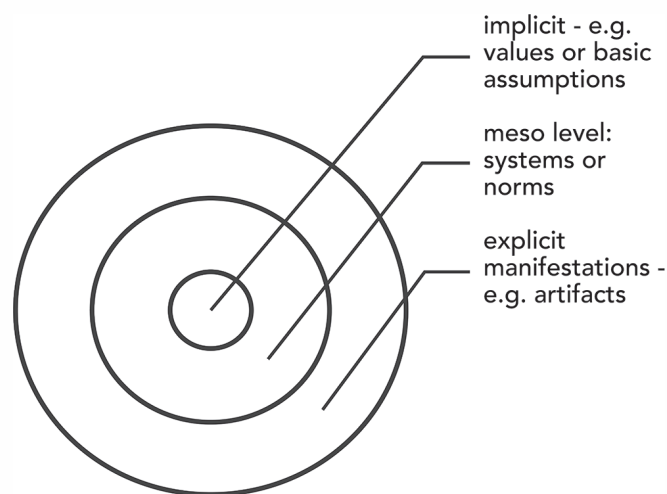
FIGURE 2.1 A summary of visual representations of a layered notion of culture

A reference to 'levels' of culture is also common in ICC popular literature for businesses and organisations (see for example Molinsky, 2016 in *Harvard Business Review*) and the various visual models have spread into everyday business discourse. Similarly, the 'impact of culture', the latter understood in the same way, is particularly visible in the use of the term: 'culture shock'.

2.2 *Culture* as a 'shock'

Crossing borders for study, work, or leisure involves contact with systems and structures that, at times, require the individual to question their own perceptions of common sense and normality. This is certainly not news and widely cited quotes such as "there are no foreign land; it is the traveller only that is foreign" (R.L. Stevenson see in Colley, 1997: 215) and similar highlight the visibility of the process of making sense of the new, the different and 'the foreign' at the level of language, behaviour, and systems. In this context the notion of *culture shock* has gradually acquired traction outside academia as an index for challenges and negative emotions in the process of transitioning.

The term is usually attributed to Oberg's work in the 1950s and it was embraced by those working on issues of integration and adaptation. Adler in 1975 defines culture shock as a "set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning" (1975: 13). The notion of distress is recurrent in studies and terms, even those introduced more recently, and is presented as an inevitable stage e.g., "even the most prepared will encounter some degree of culture shock" (Wyspianski and Fournier-Ruggles, 1985: 226).

Most early studies and certainly all the influential ones conceptualise culture shock in several stages. Oberg (1954,1960) identified four stages: a) the Honeymoon stage, b) the Crisis stage, c) the Recovery stage, and d) the Adjustment. Other theories include the U curve and W curve of adjustment. These are both visualisations of the negative and positive picks in the process of adjustment. The 'U' (Lysgaand, 1955) curve comprises three stages: *Adjustment*, *Crisis,* and *Re-adjustment*. The 'W' (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963) curve is an extension of the U curve and refers to the re-activation of the adjustment process once the individual returns to their home environment (typically referring to their home country).

Simply put, these theories attempt to model a process whereby the individual negotiates a new 'normality' and is asked to reposition Self and Other. Although the models have been, and still are, influential, they have also been criticised for taking a rather static and linear approach to integration in a new environment and for not enough acknowledgment of individual variation (see e.g., Church, 1982 for a discussion). What is also particularly problematic is the portrayal of a unilateral relationship between individuals and their environment. The 'adjustment' process seems to boil down to how well an individual can cope with the new 'culture' which is conceptualised as rather homogenous and static with some caveats for

variation and variability. The nuances in the relationship between individual agency and power are not taken into consideration. This is particularly relevant when the individual moves to a new professional environment. Although a lot of the discussion on culture shock is related to the national level, and transitions between countries have been particularly prominent, a range of other factors work together to affect an individual's reaction to their context.

Other relevant terms that have been introduced in relevant studies include 'culture fatigue' (e.g., Guthrie, 1975), 'language shock' (Smalley, 1963; Agar, 1994), and 'role shock'. The first denotes fatigue deriving from a constant process of adjustment to the requirements of the new environment. The term has been less influential than culture shock and less common in recent literature. Language shock refers to the challenges involved in using a second/foreign language in the new environment. Although the connotations of 'shock' presuppose a strong negative emotional reaction which is not inherent in any of the phenomena discussed here, the term may be more useful in foregrounding the inseparable bond between language and social context.

Linguistic research has shown the complexity in the development of sociopragmatic skills of L2 users of a language (e.g., Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010) and the challenges of accessing the tacit norms of interaction are well known in sociolinguistic research (e.g., Gumperz, 1964). At the same time, the relationship between non L1 language use and emotions has been addressed in research on multilingualism but not always in relation to ICC (cf. Angouri and Miglbauer, 2013), making it an area open for future investigation.

Role shock in its turn, refers to discrepancies between expectations in role performance in home/host environments. The term is again less frequently used although it has been seen as an important part of culture shock particularly in early studies (e.g., Juarez, 1972). Despite the same reservations, the term forces one to consider specific work environments and the multiple realities that individuals are required to manage. Work problems and managing new roles are often common reasons for undertaking ICC training and as such role shock reflects perceived issues of concern for employees in modern workplaces. Moving the locus of any 'shock' to the role expectations can provide a more nuanced focus compared to the terminology discussed earlier.

The outcome of the process of transitioning is the physical and mental change (Gudykunst, 2002), which is typically captured by the term 'acculturation'. The term has been used to capture changes at the level of the group, when groups come into contact, but also at the level of the individual (e.g., Zlobina et al., 2006). Processes of adaptation have been addressed by researchers interested in the adaptation and adjustment of international students which Zhou et al. (2008: 63) characterise as the "best researched group of cross cultural travellers". Acculturation has been related to assimilation which implies a sense of loss of the 'original' identity and as such carries negative connotations. More recently researchers (see Zhou et al., 2008 for a discussion) adopt more complex models which distinguish between life

stressors and situation specific challenges that affect integration to specific professional or societal contexts.

In line with the overall definitions of 'culture' which moved from 'static' to 'fuzzy', culture shock writing becomes more nuanced over the years. Typically, however, the 'shock' related literature understands culture as an entity that can be captured and delineated (albeit fuzzy around the edges) and which more often than not causes challenge and distress of some type or other. Recently literature has turned to positive outcomes of a 'culture shock' (e.g., Jackson, 2014). Although it is good to see an attempt to move from the negative view of cultures in contact, juxtaposing 'shock' and 'positive' constitutes a connotation clash which is conceptually difficult to sustain.

The 'shock' literature is in line with a positivist worldview of culture understood as a "static entity that causes people to behave in certain ways, to express and exhibit certain values, beliefs, and practices" (Trueba, 1992 in Hoffman, 1996: 549). In order to place this debate in its broader context, it is important to consider the epistemological and methodological traditions that were, and still are, particularly influential in Social Sciences and Humanities, starting with Positivism.

2.3 Epistemological issues: positivism-essentialism and post-positivism

Positivism, as a philosophical stance, accepts that there is a 'real world' which is objective and governed by the rules of nature. The term is associated with Auguste Comte and his writing in 1822 on the Law of the Three Stages where he suggests that knowledge and social evolution go through three stages: a) the theological/fictive stage, b) the metaphysical/abstract stage, and c) the scientific/positive stage. His work, which was directly related to the French socio–political environment of the time, soon after the French revolution in 1789, has been criticised (see e.g., Acton, 1951) but has also influenced the development of thinking in philosophy and sociology – amongst others. Positivism is in line with an empiricist research tradition and puts emphasis on the *facts* and *evidence* while rejecting anything metaphysical or theological. The focus on the rigour of scientific enquiry and method are more clearly manifested in the post-positivism stance where the emphasis on evidence through an experimental research design is highlighted.

Post-positivist thinking accepts that positive knowledge can be obtained but is continuously subject to new vigorous testing/experimenting. Positivism and Post-positivism have been associated with a quantitative methodology given the aim towards generalisability. Research in these paradigms is understood to be conducted in an objective way, free from influences by the researcher or the environment (see Chapter 4). Some influential post-positivist work of the time (see e.g., Campbell and Stanley, 1963) prioritise experimental or quasi–experimental designs for understanding causation and foreground the significance of validity (see also critique in Cronbach, 1982).

Both positivism and its successor aim for generalisability, favour the use of particular tools such as questionnaires and surveys, and had a profound influence on academic thinking in general. In ICC, this has been particularly visible in studies grounded in the discipline of psychology. As an illustration cross-cultural psychology seems to show a preference towards post-positivist research designs which aim to test and quantify traits that are then associated with different groups. Although positivism has been, at least at some level, resisted in ICC already in the 80s (e.g., influential scholars write on avoiding the "positivistic fallacy" [Hofstede, 1980: 21]), cultural difference models and generalised, universalised 'facts' which are projected upon individuals are still prominent in academic work as well as ICC first order applications and tools widely used in the workplace.

Positivism is widely associated with Essentialism. Although the two traditions have different trajectories and points of reference, the (post-)positivist's focus on the 'objective truth' is related to essentialism and its principle for revealing "realities which lie behind the appearances" (Popper, 1963: 139). Essentialism typically refers to a philosophical stance and has been associated with the work of Plato and Aristotle on the essence of things and ideas. Simply put, an essentialist epistemology attempts to capture a fixed trait or property that is shared/characterises all members of a group. Bucholtz (2003: 400) provides a useful overview:

> Essentialism is the position that the attributes and behaviour of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological characteristics believed to be inherent to the group. As an ideology, essentialism rests on two assumptions: 1) that groups can be clearly delimited and 2) that group members are more or less alike.

In the philosophy of science, essentialism has attracted a lot of criticism since the second half of the 20th century. From this perspective, Popper's work (e.g., 1957, 1972) is well known for criticising the Aristotelian theory and the limitation of 'what is' questions – i.e., questions that attempt to capture the essence or objective nature of an entity or object. Popper rejects the view that succinctly summarises essentialism according to which "in every single things there is an essence, and inherent nature or principle (such as the spirit of wine in wine) which necessarily causes it to be what it is, and thus to act as it does" (1985: 136). Popper's works have, as expected, also been criticised (see Gardner, 2001) but his ideas have undoubtedly influenced the thinking around essentialism in modern philosophy of science.

A focus on 'what is' can be still very clearly seen in ICC scholarship, much of which is focused on differences between groups – the members of which are assumed to share the same characteristics and behaviours. Essentialism has been criticised severely in recent scholarship for reducing a complex reality to a set of characteristics which oversimplify individuals and groups.

As with any school of thought, essentialism is not one single doctrine. As nicely put by Spivak "essentialism is a loose tongue" (1994: 159). And what may seem as naïve or oversimplified research could simply be poor research instead of a problem

with essentialism per se. At the same time, the quest for the 'essence' of culture is far from over yet.

The problem with this view becomes evident if one takes a closer look at the tenets of traditional essentialism. As an illustration Ereshefsky (2010) argues:

> In brief, traditional essentialism holds that essences in kinds have the follow-ing three features: (1) they occur in all and only the members of a kind, (2) they play a central role in explaining the properties typically associated with the members of a kind, and (3) they are intrinsic properties
>
> *(2010: 675).*

2.4 Influential ICC scholars associated with positivism and essentialism

The development of this line of thinking is related to work by a number of schol-ars – mainly from (social or cross-cultural) psychology background but Edward T. Hall and Harry C. Triandis occupy a particularly visible position. Hall (1959 and later works) has greatly contributed to the development of ICC and related scholarship. He made an explicit link between culture and communication which put emphasis on the importance of social interaction. Hall's (1959: 191) dictum neatly summarises their symbiotic relationship: "communication is culture, culture is communication". Although this may seem a given to many reader, this explicit link between language and culture is still missing in some current work in ICC (see Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2007; Zhu Hua, 2013). Influenced by Freudian psy-choanalysis, Hall addresses the notions of time, space, and context. He also refers to high and low context cultures where he attempts to distinguish cultures (typically framed as nationalities) on the basis of the use of contextual information in the way people communicate. According to Hall (1976: 101) "high context transac-tions feature pre-programmed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. Low context transac-tions are the reverse". In simple words, in one case the language tends to be more direct and in the other the information is communicated through reference to shared knowledge between the speakers. We are in a low context position when we need input to understand a 'private joke' or the reasons why in a meeting an utterance such as 'here we go again' has a clear reference to the discourse histories between participants that will not be transparent to a newcomer. Hall's work has been groundbreaking for ICC scholarship as well as language and culture more generally and has provided a frame for comparative studies. It has also attracted criticism for oversimplifying and essentialising (for a detailed discussion, see Kittler et al., 2011). Given that this work started in the 50s, however, one needs to credit pioneering research.

Continuing on this school of thought, Triandis's work (1995) contributed to the further development of two particularly influential constructs, namely individualism

and collectivism referring to individuals as independent (in the case of individualism) or dependent on their group. The constructs are then associated to whether an individual prioritises their own or the group's goals and the ways in which they position themselves in relation to group's norms. In this context the group can be a series of collectivities ranging from the family to the nation. He distinguishes between horizontal and vertical cultures in relation to hierarchy and power distribution. Triandis's work has paved the way for more recent studies in the notion of cultural difference and behaviour. This theory has been popularised and embraced by a number of disciplinary areas and disciplinary fields through the work of Geert Hofstede.

Hofstede's work on culture has undoubtedly shaped the field and, as expected, also attracted a lot of attention and a lot of criticism regarding the limitations of the design and the generalisability of his findings (see McSweeney, 2002; Goodstein, 1981). Hofstede reported data from employees in one multinational company, originally from forty countries, on the basis of a questionnaire which attempt to capture work values – for work on values, see also Schwartz's value orientation (2004). The findings of this research are widely cited and provide the basis of comparisons between different national groups. Hofstede suggests that "the mental programs of members of the same nation tend to contain a common component" (1980: 38). Although he aimed to study work-related values, this work has been cited for all sorts of comparisons between national groups often far from the original business context. Evidently, for any mis/applications of the research Hofstede is not to be held responsible and the wide application of the findings indicates the impact his work has had on the field. Even limiting the scope of the research in the workplace context, however, the conceptualisation of a country as a homogenous whole is problematic. In fact, it has been recognised for some time that the well-known motto 'one people – one nation–one state' (see for instance Diaz-Guerrero, 2002) is unsustainable. In the 21st-century business context, it is ever more difficult to defend the idea of 'homogeneity' of countries, especially in the workplace and the global economy, mass media, technological diffusion, and the increased mobility of people and businesses (see Chapter 3 for more on neoliberalism and post-capitalism).

Despite this criticism, a strong emphasis on nationality is still prevalent in relevant discourses. It is a view that puts the onus on the cultural 'other' and creates a context of equating cultural difference to a problem.

Hofstede's work is often summarised on the basis of the five dimensions of culture to which a sixth one (the last on the list) has been recently added. They are as follows:

Power Distance, related to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality;

Uncertainty Avoidance, related to the level of stress in a society in the face of an unknown future;

Individualism versus Collectivism, related to the integration of individuals into primary groups;

Masculinity versus Femininity, related to the division of emotional roles between women and men;

Long Term versus Short Term Orientation, related to the choice of focus for people's efforts: the future or the present and past.

Indulgence versus Restraint, related to the gratification versus control of basic human desires related to enjoying life.

(Hofstede, 2011: 8)

Recent work by Minkov (e.g., Minkov and Hofstede, 2012) has led to the addition of a sixth dimension to Hofstede's model. Minkov's work is a representative example of what I would call neo-Hofstedian research which takes the 'nation' as the basic unit of analysis and draws on large-scale surveys (e.g., Eurobarometer, Subjective Wellbeing) to compare and contrast differences (see e.g., work by Veenhoven or Ouweneel) between people organised according to national boundaries. These studies implicitly or explicitly adopt a positivist/post-positivist paradigm. Labels such as 'individualist nations' and 'high context countries' are unproblematically used and the stance is reaffirmed through the writings of new groups of scholars as well as 'popular science' writing.

The primacy placed on the nation and nationality in culture talk inside and outside the academy is beyond any need for evidence. Nationality, particularly in relation to place of birth, still has a lot of currency, particularly in ICC scholarship, focusing on understanding the 'other' and the differences with the 'self'. It also has a lot of currency in first order uses of 'culture' as a term. In response to criticism Hofstede writes: "Nations are not the best units for studying cultures, to which my answer was: True, but they are usually the only kind of units available for comparison and better than nothing" (Hofstede, 2003: 812). I find unnecessary to elaborate in too much detail on the limitations of this position. The assumptions of homogeneity and sameness that come with essentialism and the use of 'nation' as a proxy for the study of 'culture' are ideological decisions made by the researcher (see Chapter 4) and lead to particular binary narratives of difference/sameness between nations.

Culture in this context is seen as a rather static 'whole'[1] and, as Trueba suggested some time ago (1992: 80), it then becomes "some sort of amorphous reified, static entity that causes people to behave in certain ways, to express and exhibit certain values, beliefs, and practices".

Culture, used as an explanatory variable for behaviour has spread outside academia in first order workplace jargon. Narratives of the cultural 'Other' who is different to 'Us' proliferate as I discuss later on in the light of data. This *folk culturalism* (see, on banal culturalism and on metacultural discourse, 6.1) has often been taken at face value and has been used as evidence of difference between and within countries.

2.5 Culture in the nation and as a nation's property – *You know what [X] are like*

Nationality has a well-deserved place on the list of abstract notions that carry a range of meanings for lay users and theorists alike. As with all abstract concepts there is no agreed reading of the term. There is probably agreement, though, that

the various definitions adopted in research say more about the researchers' ideological positioning than the term itself. In other words, similar to culture, identity, and all other macro concepts, 'nation' can afford multiple meanings depending on the angle and standpoint of the researcher.

Nevertheless, it is an important concept and explicitly or implicitly present in discourses of culture. In the positivist paradigm, the term often denotes a group of people within determined political and economic borders. From this point of view, an equation between nation and culture creates an isomorphic relationship between the institutional manifestation of membership to a socio-political and economic entity (the nation), the language used by an individual (national language), and culture. So, for example, British culture can denote British nationality, English as L1 and knowledge of the 'complex whole' that British culture may signify. This position resonates with the positivist understanding of culture as something individuals 'have' by virtue of belonging to a group which can be labelled as a *nation*.

The level of diversity in modern societies, not new but according to many accelerated, has exaggerated our contact with variation in all domains of activity. In this context treating culture and nation as coterminous concepts is deeply problematic. The limitations associated with this position are well discussed in Wodak et al. (1999). Their work shows that a nation's assumed shared characteristics are ideological constructs and not natural facts or positions inherently shared by those who claim membership to the nation.

In order to better engage with the theoretical basis of this claim the influence of social constructionism on the Social Sciences thinking is relevant.

2.6 Epistemological issues: constructionism

Towards the middle of the 19th century, new paradigms emerged and one that is particularly relevant for this volume, namely constructionism, started gaining popularity. The work by Berger and Luckmann (1973) on 'the social construction of reality' is considered a landmark and the title reflects one of the key beliefs of this paradigm, namely that society does not objectively exist but is constructed by its members.

Constructionists reject the idea that reality exists outside the social order and place emphasis on interaction. As Burr notably states "when people talk to each other, the world gets constructed" (Burr, 2004: 8). Social constructionism outlines communication as a process that is instrumental in the creation of our social worlds. Not only do speakers talk differently depending on the situation they are in, their interaction constructs different realities. Social constructionism affords different interpretations but two key principles that are shared by social constructionists (Allen, 2005) and are relevant to us are the following:

The first is the rejection of given understandings of the world and binary opposites. In fact, for constructionists, there are no binary opposites only "mutually dependent constructs in a dialectical relationship" (Johnson and Meinhof, 1997: 2). From this perspective, characteristics projected on 'all' women, men, Brits, football

fans only exist in the reality constructed by a researcher or a lay person for that matter. People negotiate attributes and roles in interaction and in doing so the social order is perpetuated and brought under scrutiny at the same time. Through a nuanced analysis of discourse, linguists (and others) unpack how speakers negotiate 'common sense' – taken-for-granted knowledge and social organisation.

The second principle is that knowledge is historically specific, continuously renegotiated and sustained in social processes. As an illustration, the way speakers handle a business meeting not only reflects the social structure but reproduces it too at a given moment in time in a particular socio-political and economic context. Constructionism does not mean that binaries have stopped existing nor does it indicate a stance whereby the researcher renounces oppositions. Research talking about how speakers construct reality may not necessarily challenge the post/positivist rationale. Constructionism can implicitly, or unintentionally, converge with post/positivism. As an example by talking about how Greeks 'do' Greekness, one may assume that I have accepted that 'Greekness' exists independently of the social context and hence can be compared with other –ness*es*. This however is a matter of interpretation and can be subjected to the same reservations related to the positivist/post-positivist paradigm.

To take this further, current research addresses the relationship between behaviours and discourses *normatively* associated with specific categories and the agency of the individual in challenging or reifying dominant meanings. In this process it is not uncommon for accounts to slip into reproducing binaries on the grounds of gender, nationality, ethnicity, and so on. To continue with my Greekness example, one could read reference to weather in Greece, the summer sun, or the Parthenon marbles as resources mobilised in interaction to position the self as Greek. This however is the researcher's reading of a particular piece of discourse; there is nothing inherently associating one's claim to Greekness and any of the topics I identified here (see also Angouri et al., 2017). The complexities of interpreting data are discussed later in this volume; the relevant point I seek to make here is that a constructionist position does not always break free from conceptual binaries and oppositions between wo/men, nationalities, age groups, and so on. As nicely put by Kessler and McKenna "where there are dichotomies, it is difficult to avoid evaluating one in relation to another" (1978: 164). This is particularly relevant in culture-related research that self-identifies as constructionist but soon falls back into an, implicit or explicit, static understanding of the social world and attributes behaviours to large categories. Social constructionism has become the dominant paradigm in workplace discourse studies, and I am one who has adopted it (see e.g., Angouri, 2011, 2013). However further theoretical clarity in how it is adopted and applied can be beneficial for further developing its affordances. The same applies to work that rejects the excessive use of the 'nation' as the main unit for carrying research but quickly contradicts this position by falling back on differences and national descriptors (see e.g., Holliday, 2011 on neo-essentialism).

Having said all this, the analytical limitations of a direct equation of *culture* to *nation* should not ignore the currency the latter holds in first order accounts as

I will discuss later in more detail. The nation is an important resource for claiming/projecting cultural difference/similarity and as such, it needs to be given consideration as to how and why it is being used in lay users' narratives (see also case studies in Chapter 8). A particularly significant theoretical contribution to this discussion draws on the concept of the nation as an *imagined community* and the *critical agenda*.

2.7 The nation as an imagined community

Constructionist and critical approaches (2.6; 2.8) understand nationality as a construct which is enacted in and through discourse and is negotiated between individuals in different contexts. 'Nationality' has a political/legal component which finds a clear manifestation in citizenship criteria and eligibility. It also has a 'fluid' component which is constructed through the discourse of members and non-members. Taking a critical approach S Hall (1996b: 613) succinctly states that:

> People are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the idea of the nation as represented in its national culture [. . .] national cultures construct identities by producing meanings about 'the nation' with which we can identify; these are contained in the stories which are told about, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it.

This is in line with the (well-known to the anticipated readers of this book) work by Anderson (1991) who argued that nations constitute imagined communities and the actual difference between them is related to the ways they are imagined by members who self-identify (or are identified) with the group.

According to Anderson: "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is the fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (1991: 7).

Anderson's work has been particularly influential and widely cited in sociolinguistic discourse in relation to the nation as well as community *membership*. The 'community' carries connotations of cohesion – members have something in common – and belongingness and this can also be seen in dictionary definitions of the term. Anderson's position challenges the notion of homogeneity of national but also any other large or small communities. It has been well discussed in relation to the speech community, which has been traditionally related to the language variety that the members of a community are understood to have in common and which distinguishes them from other social groups. Current studies take a clear stance in favour of a dynamic and context sensitive understanding of the 'community' which has preoccupied the field since its early days (e.g., Labov, 1972).

Gumperz already in his 1982 work questioned the distinct boundaries of the community unit as follows: "The assumption that speech communities, defined as functionally integrated social systems with shared norms of evaluation, can actually

be isolated [...] becomes subject to serious question" (1982: 26). And later, Gumperz and Levinson (1996: 11) refer to "networks of interacting individuals" in an attempt to capture the dynamic relationship between the individual and the collective. The notion has been traditionally adopted as a unit of analysis for linguistic and other behaviours and this is particularly relevant to the common understanding of 'culture/s' as shared norms and values between groups of people.

The framing and demarcation of the boundaries of a 'community', in relation to other broad or narrow assemblages, depend on the researchers' standpoints and are subject to the theoretical and epistemological issues that have been addressed earlier. Researchers taking a post/positivist approach often frame a community on the basis of characteristics associated with macro categories such as age, gender, ethnicity, language (amongst others) while constructionists or postmodernists see the community defined through participation, imaginaries of membership, and emergent and negotiated in interaction.

The concept of the 'imagined' and the 'imaginary' of national homogeneity is particularly useful (see Wodak et al., 1999/2009) in exploring the relationship between culture and nation. The nation state of the 19th century, built on narrative of unity and homogeneity, brings with it canonical understandings of culture as patterned, shared, and homogenous. And despite the pace of change in late capitalist economies and the dominant discourses of globalisation and (super)diversity, the dominant rhetoric of homogeneity persists. This is particularly visible in political discourse (and notably national rhetoric), as well as everyday interaction in political context – which includes the workplace.[2]

The myths of national homogeneity and sharedness of culture occupy a privileged position in those narratives. National identity is almost a synonym for cultural identity and a resource for constructing 'self' and 'other'. Accordingly, they are also powerful tools for in/exclusion and for controlling membership and claims to being one of 'us'.

Well put by S Hall (1996b: 613):

> A national culture is a discourse – a way of constructing meanings which influences and organises both our actions and our conception of ourselves ... National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about 'the nation' with which we can identify; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and imagines which are constructed of it.

The nation is a powerful construct mobilised in first order discourses and built on an imaginary of homogeneity and belonging using essentialised common-sense inferences of symbols, conventions, and simplified representations of the nation (Billig, 1995). This contributes to a 'national habitus' (Wodak, 2015), which in its turn provides a resource for positioning in space and time.

Similarities (or differences) between countries are also widely reproduced in dominant and powerful discourses in policy contexts. The discourses produced in

the context of the European Union are good candidates for analysis. For instance, Smith (1995: 187) states that the European Union might be mainly "economic in content" but "there are also broader European cultural patterns which transcend national cultural boundaries to create an overlapping 'family' of common components". And according to the EU websites (European Commission and European Parliament), the common heritage of European cultures is not only widely agreed upon but is also at the base of the Union. Times of (financial) crises test those narratives of homogeneity (Wodak, 2015), but it is still useful to see, for instance:

> The Article 3.3 of the Lisbon Treaty which states: "The Union shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and [. . .] ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced" and Article 128 from the Maastricht treaty, which specifically concerns culture, states the following: "The Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the member states, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore". The construction of a certain *Europeanness* based on an imaginary of similarity is particularly relevant here. And at the same time the national habitus is particularly prominent in the framing of Metacultural discourse and the enactment of cultural difference and struggle. This stance resonates with critical approaches to culture as I discuss next.

2.8 Epistemological issues: critical approaches

Starting from an ideological position which understands culture as "a site of struggle" (Halualani and Nakayama, 2013: 6), the 21st century saw an increase in culture research taking a critical perspective (e.g., Piller, 2011; Holliday, 2011). A critical perspective focuses on the power im/balance and struggle in different contexts. From this point of view, culture and ideology cannot be understood separately from one another. Ideological positions of the 'Other' are represented as 'cultural' and underpin dominant discourses. As an example, discourses of immigration, financial crisis, mobility, and international education often come with projections of cultural traits onto the 'other'. This process, whether negative or positive, creates an 'Us and Them' binary and can mask the power imbalance or other forces that interact and interplay in any given setting.

The school of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in Linguistics has focused on the relationship between the 'here and now' and the social structure and has shown over the years (see e.g., Wodak, 1997 onwards) the ways in which discursive practices produce or resist power relations between individuals. The way the notion of 'critical' is used however can denote different positions for different researchers. While for some it indexes a political agenda, for others it denotes an acknowledgment of the power structures and social order. Linguists who take a CDA approach often address issues of immigration, ethnicity, and gender, amongst others, but typically not under an ICC agenda − cf. however Communication Studies in the US. The recent Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication (Nakayama and Halualani, 2011) is a good example of this growing area.

Communication and Cultural studies have made a strong contribution to the development of critical thinking in issues around language and culture. In those disciplinary areas the influence of Critical Theory has been particularly prominent. Critical theory is related to the work of the Frankfurt School and more recently theorists such as Gramsci and Habermas (for a discussion see Held, 1980). Critical Theory is, as with any movement, not a single doctrine but some key principles that are relevant to the discussion here have to do with an opposition to a positivist approach to scientific enquiry and taken for granted knowledge. Critical Theory challenges the established structures in societies and foregrounds the power imbalance and the dominant discourses imposed on the weakest/marginalised/silenced by those in positions of power in any given society. In its early form it draws on the work on Freud and Marx and demonstrates a clear link with psychoanalysis (e.g., Adorno, 1946). Habermas is amongst the most visible representatives of the Frankfurt School. Habermas's work is particularly salient as his emphasis on a *theory of communication* (Habermas, 1970) foregrounds the unbreakable bond between language and ideology. Habermas writes on communicative competence (1970), criticises the then gaining in popularity Chomskyan approach and elaborates on the work on speech acts, inspired by Austin and Searle.

Habermas argues that speakers make meaning by negotiating necessary truth conditions and agreed norms or self-images which underpin the interaction. Although Habermas approaches the notion of competence from a philosophical perspective, the notion of reaching common ground between a speaker and listener remains central in discourse analytic scholarship which often focuses on instances of miscommunication or communication breakdowns. Habermas and the work of the school of Frankfurt influenced what is known as the Birmingham school of Cultural Studies (see e.g., Hall and DuGay, 1996). The work by the Birmingham school and Stuart Hall is particularly relevant as it problematised taken for granted understandings of 'culture' and the ways in which dominant ideologies are manifested, perpetuated, resisted, and so on. His work also foregrounds the role of media in representing and constructing 'cultured' images of individuals and groups. As he argues (2003: 91), media provides "representations of the social world, images, descriptions, explanations, and frames for understanding how the world is and why it works as it is said and shown to work".

The work of S Hall has had enormous influence on unpacking the complexities of the notion of identity and on the need to reposition the 'cultural' in the globalised world. Culture is enacted both at *macro-* and *micro-*contexts and is a political and ideological construct, situated and negotiated in the interaction between the participants. S Hall's work made a useful contribution in unpacking the connection between structure and agency and the moment of interaction with the wider socioeconomic and political order (see Figure 8.1). As he notes (1973: 172):

> Any society/culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a *dominant cultural order* [italics in original] though it is neither univocal not uncontested. This question of the 'structure of discourses in dominance' is a

crucial point. The different areas of social life appear to be mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organised into *dominant or preferred meanings* [italics in original].

I will return to the notion of preferred meaning in the light of the cases discussed later in the book. S Hall's work has had wide influence in critical studies and around the 1990s in Linguistic scholarship too – especially in Critical Discourse Analysis. In line with the dominant, critical, constructionist approaches in Social Sciences, the number of culture-related studies that attempt to address this complexity have increased. These voices however exist alongside a strong post-positivist tradition and the two camps rarely interact.

Apart from a lack of dialogue that characterises an area of scholarship that deals with communication, this means that debates around *structure and agency* or the *constructed and the real* rarely cut across the different schools of thought. Although my own stance is aligned with the constructionist/critical end of the continuum, I argue that different points of view provide access to different meanings and hence exchange of ideas is, by definition, useful in moving the field beyond its own static binaries between the positivists, constructionists, and critical theorists.

On the antipodes of a narrow definitions of culture, the increased and increasing contact and mobility has also supported discourses of a global culture beyond the borders and categories of the past.

2.9 *Culture* as a universal

The global circulation of media as well as of goods and services, have made the *global culture* construct a popular one in academic debates and everyday discourses. Few would disagree that 'globalisation' in one guise or other is relevant to any individual whether they are operating within or outside the context of their country of birth. Globalisation scholars (see e.g., Friedman, 2006 but also Christopherson et al., 2008) distinguish between different 'globalisation waves' and the socio-political significance of the phenomenon and convincingly argue that the local and global have become inextricably linked. Terms such as 'glocal' (e.g., Robertson, 1994), attempting to capture the intersection of the global and the local, are by now mainstream in the academic jargon.

In this context, the concept of a 'global culture' continues a line of thinking that is also reflected in earlier attempts to capture the dynamic process of mobility and people/businesses/language contact on culture. Concepts such as the *transnational culture* and the third place or third culture (e.g., Kramsch, 1993, 2009) are good examples. The global culture construct is also in line with the formation of supra-national economic and political partnerships (e.g., the European Union) but does not refer to a 'homogenous' world state (e.g., chapters in Featherstone, 1990).

It is a useful notion to address the dynamics of mobility and diversity in modern societies. As argued by Appadurai (1996) global cultural flows can be conceptualised in relation to *ethnoscapes*, *technoscapes*, *financescapes*, *mediascapes,* and *ideoscapes*.

Appadurai's framework shows the different nodes in a system of junctures and disjunctures and the building blocks of social imaginary. In the context of the capitalist economy and the 'new work order' (Gee et al., 1996) a dynamic understanding of global processes and flows is necessary to capture and explore the changing nature of the world work in line with the asymmetries, imbalances, and conflicts in the broader socioeconomic environment. This however is not to be misinterpreted for a world of perceived 'sameness'.

The connotations of homogeneity at a global level that derive from the use of the word 'culture' have been resisted by scholars and lay people alike (see, for discussions, Pauleen and Murphy, 2005; Smith, 1995; Bargiela- and Harris, 1997). As Smith argued we are "far from even mapping out [...] a global culture [...] that can supersede a world of nations" (Smith, 1995: 188) and this is evident not only in the business but also the economic and the political sphere. The rise of populism and the re-territorialisation we are currently witnessing, and Europe is a case in point, shows that we are far from a dominant discourse of a Cosmopolis.[3]

At the same time, diversity and global mobility are one of the core characteristics of the workplace and the concept of workplace culture as superseding other 'types' of culture has already been hotly debated in the literature.

2.10 *Culture* in work

The complexity of the 'workplace culture' construct is well reflected in the number and divergence of the various definitions (see Frost et al., 1991: 7 ff. for a discussion; Alvesson, 2012; Keyton, 2011). A common understanding of the term is that each organisation has a distinct way of doing things (Pauleen and Wu, 2004) and that there are various structures and/or overlapping 'norms' within any setting. Schein defines workplace culture, or more accurately, the culture of a work group, as a

> pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.
>
> *(1992: 12 and 1990: 111)*

It is interesting to note a *problem solving* angle in definitions of workplace culture. This echoes Habermas who suggested that "a culture can be conceived as an ensemble of enabling conditions for problem-solving activities" (2005: 22). This is not an uncommon position also for organisational theorists who have argued that culture can be conceptualised as an "automated problem solving device" (Loch and Terwiesch, 2008: 335).

Recent work (e.g., Schneider et al., 2013) attempts to move from debates of the past and distinguishes between organizational climate and organizational culture contrasting 'shared perceptions' vs. 'basic assumptions' (see also Leonardi, 2011 on membership in organisational culture; on collective knowledge, see Hecker, 2012).

The relationship between corporate and national culture has also preoccupied the literature (e.g., Pauleen and Wu, 2004; Weisinger and Trauth, 2002; Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Mazur, 2010; Strese et al., 2016). For instance, Pauleen and Wu (2004) argue that the hypothesis that organisations exist autonomously and not in relation to the wider social (and national) environment is not supported by their research or by a range of other work in the field (see also Mason, 2003; Kivrak et al., 2014). They use the terms 'culture-free' and 'culture-bound' to refer to the two positions. This is in line with a rich body of research attempting to move away from narrow conceptualisation of nation but still using it as a container and an explanatory variable for different behaviours.

In line with what I argued earlier, my position is that organisations do not *have* culture, people *do* culture; this is best seen as a set of practices which constitute and are constituted in the context of the participants' workplace setting (see organisation as discourse Section 3.2). This is not to suggest that there are no norms (see Cameron, 1995), linguistic or other, which are reproduced or resisted in interaction and which are visible to those engaged with a setting. Particularly in professional contexts, norms are related to the ways in which businesses talk themselves into being (Heritage, 2005) and the ways in which business is conducted. The 'corporate culture' construct is also widely used by the participants in all the projects I have been involved with. Hence it offers a useful way into capturing employees' perceptions of what constitutes normative and appropriate ways of doing business in their context.

As Heath and Bryant (2000) suggest, "culture is shared and learned as a means by which organization members [. . .] share a social reality" (p. 320). The organisational culture from this point of view is a construct which emerges through practices associated with the company, the company's material environment, the industry, the people who work there, and so on.

Workplace discourse research has argued that workplace practices cannot be easily decontextualised and require one to look both in the activities of individuals as well as the organisation and socio-cultural context. Weisinger and Trauth (2002: 309) have contributed a particularly useful definition:

> culture does not refer to stable, generalised dimensions assumed to be held in common by members of a particular group. Rather, it is fluid, contextually dependent, and created by actors within a group who may hold conflicting assumptions and worldviews. In other words, "culture is what culture does" [commas in original] ~~culture is what culture does~~.

In line with this view, I consider workplace practices to be situated and dynamic constantly (re)negotiated among the participants in interaction (Holmes and Marra, 2002; Giddens, 1984; Gherardi, 2011). By extension, individuals draw on normative representations of groups internal or external to the workplace to project or claim specific subject positions and to achieve specific goals. By drawing on

representations of 'all British', 'all women', 'all employees', and so on, ideologies are foregrounded and individuals construct themselves in relation to a symbolic representation (Alvesson, 1992) that carries meaning in their context.

To conclude this point, to solely emphasise the concept of distinctiveness of the different 'cultures' can be misleading if the context of the interaction is not taken into account. Sarangi (1994) suggests that the societal and institutional roles of interactants are by and large ignored when culture is 'blamed' as the reason for communication breakdowns. In the same vein, a long time ago, Shea (1994: 379) states that:

> how utterances are interpreted is mediated by how speakers are positioned and their discourse structured: whether interactional authority is granted and referential perspective is recognised, or whether participation is reduced and neglected. It is not cultural differences in and of themselves, but the way they are taken up and negotiated, which critically determines the shape and success of intercultural interaction.

From a different perspective Louhiala-Salminen (2002) also argued on the limitations of attempting to explain perceptions of difference in the workplace through the lanes of static abstract categories such as national cultures. She argues on the importance of the local context to explain routines and practices which seem to "override" (2002: 224) other possible subject positions. Like other researchers (see for instance Starke-Meyerring, 2005; Brandt and Clinton, 2002), the stance taken is that there is a constant interplay between the local practices and the employees' perceptions of their socioeconomic and political context. This maps on a system of ideologies and myths perceived as social realities by the participants in any given setting. It also foregrounds the importance of everyday workplace routines and the ways in which the organisation (and its 'culture') comes into being (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Vaara (1999, 2000) also writes on the 'misconceptions' associated with narrow operationalisations of culture and definitions that "disregard of cultural differentiation, fragmentation, inconsistencies and ambiguities" (Vaara, 1999: 65) in making sense of the organisation. This literature puts practice at the centre of the enquiry and shows how activities are accomplished locally by the active work of workplace actors. Looking into organisational practice is not only a conduit into culture at work but also identity at work. I discuss the unbreakable bond between the two concepts in the next section.

2.11 Culture, identity, and cultural identity

> *"Who are YOU?" said the Caterpillar.*
> *This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I –*
> *I hardly know, sir, just at present – at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morn-*
> *ing, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."*
> *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

'Identity', conventionally, refers to an individual's or group's sense of who they are as claimed by them and projected on them by others. The term is often used with a plural inflection, in an attempt to represent the multiplicity of the concept.

Defining and analysing identity is subject to the same issues identified earlier in relation to definitions of culture. Whether and to what extent identity is understood, by the researcher, as something people 'have' or something we all 'do' influence both the aims and the outcomes of any research project. The researchers' epistemological stances influence methodological decisions and designs and results to different and contradicting definitions. Top-down categorisation processes are related to projections of similarity and difference between groups. As an example by talking about British culture, or what all 'students' do, I project various characteristics, typically represented or understood by the speaker as stable, to people who may or may not self-identify with an abstract group and in doing this I construct the group.

In the current socio–political and economic context, discourses of ethnicity and ethnic identity proliferate. Identity is treated in literature as a fluid process which is constantly negotiated and scrutinised by the interactants in any given setting. This is in line with the constructionist paradigm according to which identity is not seen as fixed but discursively constructed in different contexts. Workplace discourse studies take the same line (Angouri and Marra, 2011 for an overview also in Angouri and Angelidou, 2012) and foreground the complex relationship between identity construction processes and power.

Identity is constructed by individuals who perform 'self' and 'other' in specific historical and socioeconomic contexts. Histories as well as norms, as understood by those involved in interaction, transcend the specific instance of discourse and link the here and now with the broader societal order. This foregrounds the complex relationship between the 'self' and 'society'. As Bucholtz and Hall suggest "[o]n the one hand, the subject is the agent, the subject OF social processes; on the other hand, the subject is the patient, subject TO social processes" (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004: 493–494; emphasis in original). Identity constructs are formed by drawing on perceptions of difference/similarity and are directly related to the power (im) balance in different societal and professional settings (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Jenkins, 2014).

The importance of sameness and conformity for constructing self has also been discussed in influential theories of identity including Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory (for a discussion Stets and Burke, 2000). Both theories provide a framework for unpacking the relationship between individual and society. Identity theory foregrounds role and role performance as a key factor in explaining self-identity. 'Self' in ~~for~~ Identity Theory is seen as occupying a particular role and enacting the expectations that are associated with that particular societal position. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1972, 1974; Turner, 1975; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) on the other hand emphasises intergroup relations and group behaviour. Social Identity Theory has had a significant influence on sociolinguistic research and language

and identity studies (e.g., Joseph, 2004). The in/out group terms are widely used to refer to characteristics that are perceived as shared by those in the 'in group' and contrasted with the 'out group'. By aiming to conform (or not) to a group's shared behaviours, an individual draws on what they perceive as *the norm*. This is an ideological construct which is developed in the process of claiming membership or distancing the self from a group.

Identity from this point of view is dynamic and constantly evolving in relation to the situational context and the group context which is also dynamic. Although Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory developed as two distinct theoretical frameworks, in line with a recent work, I do not consider them as mutually exclusive. As noted by Stets and Burke "In most instances the differences [between Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory] are a matter of emphasis rather than kind" (Stets and Burke, 2000: 234). Further to this, roles and role performance are related to a group's norms and expectations of performance. A medical doctor seeking medical help enacts the 'doctor–patient interaction' from a different footing compared to others who do not claim/given shared membership to the clinicians group.

Performing self in a different context is then subject to a range of situated factors. Goffman's work has effectively discussed the dramaturgical dimension of *performing* 'self'. People perform self in relation to where they are, who they are with, what they want to achieve and so on. Understanding self as social was not new when Goffman introduced his work. Mead's (1934) work and even Cooley (1992) wrote on the inseparable relationship between self and society.

Mead (1934: 140) argues that:

> The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience. After a self has arisen, it in a certain sense provides for itself its social experiences, and so we can conceive of an absolutely solitary self. But it is impossible to conceive of a self arising outside of social experience.

Society continuously projects roles on the individual and the individual scrutinises the societal structure. This constant negotiation between self and other in the societal context and the notion of 'doing' is still at the core of current discourse theories of identity. Identity is simultaneously fragmented and complete, situated and normative, temporary and stable, micro and macro and so on. It is actively done *by* the individual but also projected *on* the individual by others. In other words, it's a mutli-way process (Angouri, 2015).

Bucholtz and Hall (2010) provided a well-rounded conceptual frame for capturing the discursive view of identity as construed in interaction. They propose five principles for the study of identity as follows: Emergence, Positionality, Indexicality, Relationality and Partialness. Bucholtz and Hall approach identity as context-bound (positionality principle), indexically rooted in ideological structures, beliefs, and values (indexicality principle), always partial and discontinuous (partialness

principle) and, importantly, as 'intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations' Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 589 (relationality principle).

The latter is particularly important and outlines the importance of the 'other' for the construction of 'self'. To take this further, the notion of difference is central in processes of identity construction. Succinctly put by S Hall (1996a: 4):

> Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity.

Issues of exclusion and power have been discussed in ICC under the cultural identity umbrella, a term used to mark the intersection of culture, identity, and a range of related concepts such as ethnicity, race, and nationality. Discussing in detail each of these notions goes well beyond the scope of this section. Ethnic identity however is particularly visible as a *cultural* identity. While the former is still understood as "a sense of common origin, common beliefs and values, common goals, in brief 'common cause'" (Devos, 1972: 435), the latter is conceptualised often as a hierarchically higher concept which can be 'divided' in 'smaller' identities. Both positions have been usefully problematised in the literature. Cultural identity as a hyper category would mean that the boundaries between categories are distinct, context free, and can be defined by the researcher. This is a position that I find theoretically difficult to defend. Both culture and identity are macro notions which afford a number of different meanings in the context where they are mobilised. Using cultural identity as a super category may be a metaphorical construct but has limited analytical value. At the same time 'ethnic identity' is often used interchangeably or turns to national identity (and vice versa) used to denote a common 'culture' shared by a group, and typically also origin and language. 'Cultural' is then easily appended to names of countries or even more abstract labels: e.g., a search for 'Western Cultural Identity' on Google always returns thousands of results ~~(compare with the 'Asian Discourse System' by Scollon and Scollon, 2001)~~

The homogeneity of ethnic groups or nations constitutes a powerful fantasy grounded on the idea of a whole which has continuity in time and space and is communicated through a range of symbols and symbolic practices which acquire power through their use. Nations are imagined and defined through their membership instead of any inherent characteristic of purity or similarity. This is particularly relevant in the way cultural identity is interpreted. Cultural identity draws directly on the notion of cultural difference. Difference and sameness however are rather fluid notions, negotiated by the interactants and have different meaning for speakers and researchers (who do not operate in the same contexts nor do they have the same agendas). "[T]he ability to negotiate speaker identity in a communicative

event is [not] shared equally by all participants" (Meyerhoff and Niedzielski, 1994: 317), and there are indeed issues that should be taken into consideration, not least the power relationship of the participants. This, however, does not contradict the thesis that ways of *doing* and of *being* are constantly co-constructed and negotiated between the participants. I return to this point in the light of the data in Part 3.

To conclude the discussion, both culture and identity have become so extended that they stand for a range of other (often equally macro) notions. Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 1) argue in relation to identity that it "tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)". It is my view that this is particularly applicable to the *cultural identity* construct. Having said this, however, these debates highlight attempts to capture the fraught relationship between structure and agency either through the perspective of the group ('culture') or the individual vis a vis the group ('identity'). This is particularly relevant to workplace context and the association with expectations of role enactment and ways of doing as I discuss in Part 3. Claiming homogeneity, sameness, or difference is subject to categorisation processes and representations of characteristics that distinguish one group from another. I turn to this before closing 2.

2.12 Identity, categorisation processes, and the politics of difference

We all draw on generalised ~~and generalisable~~ characteristics of people, settings, events, or experiences in making sense of the world around us. This is a common topos in categorisation processes.

Categorisation has been seen as "a fundamental and universal process because it satisfies a basic human need for cognitive parsimony" (Abrams and Hogg, 2006: na). Categorisation is typically understood as a process involving reduction in order to reach a viable level of generalisability. It has been associated with stereotyping and has been addressed in social psychology as well as sociology and linguistics while it is particularly visible in work on identity. In ICC as well as in Linguistic literature, attempts to capture ~~generalisable~~ characteristics of societal groups have been common. It is a position that has been criticised for perpetuating narrow representations of people, feeding into stereotypes, accentuating the socioeconomic and political power imbalance between groups, as well as for creating static top-down categories projected on individuals. This is, evidently, a strongly negative evaluation. Zooming in the process of representation or stereotyping is significant, however, for understanding how and why particular representations are mobilised in first order workplace talk in particular. I probe this further in relation to metacultural discourse in Chapter 6.

Further, stereotypes are commonly seen as representations of groups; they carry connotations of behaviour in general and discursive behaviour in particular (e.g., women are more polite than men, Greeks interrupt more than Norwegians, and so on). Simply put they are typically understood to be exaggerations but which

include a 'grain of truth' for lay users. Recent work however argues that framing stereotypes as either rigid overgeneralisations or fixed social knowledge shared by a group or schemas and assessing them as 'right' or 'wrong' is only part of the story: a story that is complex, multifaceted, and highly political and ideological.

Stereotypes are typically associated with negative connotations about a group of people, but they have also been represented as positive processes for unpacking complex behaviour. As an example McGarty et al. (2002) refer to stereotypes as *shared beliefs* between groups, *aids* to explaining behaviour, and, accordingly, *energy-saving* mechanisms for understanding a complex world. These are all terms that resonate with lay and academic uses of the 'stereotypes' term. Work on stereotypes has been influenced by work in cognitive and social psychology and the theories of social representation. Moscovici's work has been particularly influential in this respect, Moscovici understands social representation as "a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history" (1961: xiii). He writes on the relationship between perception and social reality; "nobody's mind is free from the effects of prior conditioning which is imposed by his [sic] representations, language, culture" (1984: 8). Many take this line of work; what is relevant here is that social representation attempts to bridge the cognitive tradition, whereby social knowledge is represented as fixed in the mind of the individual, alongside an acknowledgment of the influence of the social context. Although psychological approaches to the study of stereotypes do not typically engage with the socio-political and ideological environment within which individual operate, recent work (for an account, see Hinton, 2016) makes a good case for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of shared meanings and representations.

Representations or heuristics, or whatever other term one may want to use, have multiple meanings and functions; they are fluid and both pre-exist individuals and are negotiated and emerge in daily practices. Work by discourse analysts on 'common sense', assumed, shared positions for taking/projecting a stance (e.g., Angouri et al., 2017) has shown how dominant discourses circulate, are perpetuated, and are resisted through powerful/less actors. In recent work on the discourses of the financial crisis (see Angouri and Wodak, 2014), we discussed in detail how victims and perpetrators are constructed in media and everyday discourses and how positive and negative images are used in the rhetoric of stereotypes, which is mobilised in a broader socio-political context. Both negative (more common) and positive attributions are represented as common-sensical/given positions and form part of the rhetoric the interactants use to achieve their goals. There is however nothing inherent in this process which is ideological and political.

In any given context, people mobilise prior knowledge, learned behaviours, historicities, experiences, and so forth. At the same time, they also negotiate new information, the specifics of the situation at hand, and perpetuate or resist shared meanings. There is nothing fixed or inherent in the process. It is through everyday routines and practices that meaning is constructed and ways of doing and behaving are accepted, rejected, or modified. Categorisation processes and negotiation

of shared meaning have been studied in ICC literature in relation to othering. For instance, Holliday refers to othering as a process whereby two images are constructed a "demonised image of them, or Other, which supports an idealised image of 'us' or Self" (2011: 69). The process of otherisation is ideological and draws on normative representations in order to explain behaviour from the perspective of the speaker. Processes of othering have been discussed in relation to gender, race, as well as ethnicity (see e.g., Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2006 or Said, 1978).

An 'Us and Them' polarised representation of reality allows space for the speaker to create an imagined 'other' through distancing or relating to qualities attributed to 'self'. The implications of otherisation or othering have been well discussed in work on Orientalism where the 'uncivilised' and 'exotic' other has shown to be dehumanised and represented as inferior to the centre-West (see Said, 1978; Halliday, 2011 and later works and Pennycook, 1994 for relevant discussions). Piller argues, and I agree, that "Culturism is a form of Orientalism" (2012: 12); an ideology that reinstates power relationships and imbalances through abstractly defined differences attributes to cultural (as national/ethnic) characteristics.

I understand culturalism as a process by which simplified representations of the culture of the 'other' and cultural difference are mobilised, associated with people and behaviours and used to explain away a range of complex issues – typically but not always in the negative. Culturalism in the workplace emerges as metacultural discourse, reaffirms inequality drawing on macro-scale nationalistic narratives and associates this to everyday work practice. The politics of difference is at the core of the process. Narratives of difference are a powerful resource and serve the purposes of maintaining or challenging the (political) status quo in any given setting. Regimes of power imbalance operate on boundaries and binaries – such as majority/minority, male/female, young/old, and so on. This is relevant in all aspects of human activity and certainly in the workplace. Building on Billig's banal nationalism concept, and Piller's work (2012), a case can be made for *banal culturalism* drawing on *banal nationalism*. Issues of power are critical in the process and a detailed review goes beyond the aim of the book. However, looking systematically into the concept of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991 and in Section 3.7) as negotiated between individuals and groups is particularly useful in contextualising and analysing the role representations of the 'other' play in daily realities at work. This process is related to negotiating the power im/balance and enacting professional roles and identities in any workplace setting. I illustrate this by drawing on data in Chapter 8.

2.13 Position taken in the volume expanded

To conclude, in line with the view taken in this book (see Introduction), culture and identity constructs are political and ideological, directly related to the imaginary of group homogeneity which forms the basis of collective myths and fantasies. I take a critical view and I see culture and identity as *local accomplishments*, interactionally negotiated in and through organisational practices. This takes place in a very political space, the workplace.

Explaining away phenomena *because of* 'culture' is analytically limited and limiting. At the same time if we take the position that 'culture' is astructural, ahistrorical, or apolitical, then we need to address the core issue of culture becoming "an amorphous, indescribable mist which swirls around society members" (Fine, 1979: 733). In current scholarship culture is less the essence of nations or groups or individuals, it is more widely used in sociological and workplace sociolinguistic literature as "discourse, symbols, boundaries, frames, cognitive schema[ta], narratives and stories, identities, norms, values, beliefs, works of art, ways of life, and institutional codes" Ghaziani (2009: 584) and the list goes on. Remaining at the level of seeing culture as a 'mist' (Fine, 1979 or Swidler, 1995) does not allow analytical operations nor does it capture how lay people use the term. Looking at the *processes* by which people make culture and the metacultural relevant is, in view, more important than the effort to find a catholic definition for a term that is inherently abstract.

Already in 1986, Swidler, refers to 'culture as toolkit' foregrounding the agency of people in mobilising 'symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews' which we all use to achieve our goals be it getting a job, negotiating access to centres of power in a society or selective institutions, navigating a complex meeting, persuading a client on the quality of an organisation, and so on. In Swidler's terms, we 'construct strategies[4] of action' (1986: 273).

Culture is seen, then, as action enacted in *interaction*. This process brings to the fore the work individuals do in negotiating dominant discourses and in the situated here and now of interaction. Again in the 80s, Schudson writes on the significance of taking into consideration the agency of the individual and the socio-political order: "it is essential to recognise simultaneously that (1) human beings make their own history and (2) they do not make it according to circumstances of their own choosing" (1989: 156). We should add to this that they do not make (1) and (2) outside specific contexts of interaction. This process is political and ideological.

I now turn to the modern workplace.

Notes

1 The term 'whole' draws on an early definition in 1950s by Tylor according to which culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".

2 'Political' is another term that affords different meaning in different contexts. On one hand, political discourse conically refers to the discourse of political actors (e.g., professional politicians, parliamentarians, and so on). Its use however is much wider and can also refer to discourses related to political actions, actors or systems. It has also been used to designate a focus on power and inequality in language use. Same issues apply here: if everything is political, then what isn't? Although I do not understand discourse as necessarily political, I take issues of power, asymmetry, and participation to be. Further to this, political discourse may prototypically refer to the work of politicians, government, or political institutions. This however would not do justice to everyday political discourse (Wodak, 2011; Chilton and Schaffner, 2002), nor would it account for the importance of the work people do in their work settings. In a recent work (Angouri and Mondada, 2017) we focused on business meetings and discussed *the politics of meetings* in relation to choices people make in order to guard or claim power through maintaining or

challenging established routines and ways of doing. Accordingly, I consider the workplace to be a political context where situating self and other is subject to negotiating the status quo and perpetuating or challenging the existing hierarchical order.

3 As with the Stoic philosophers in Ancient Greece (school of philosophy formed around Zeno of Citium in the third century BC – Stoicism made a significant contribution to the thinking around cosmopolitanism), belonging to the cosmos goes above one single polis. It is possible to be a citizen of cosmos, united by the rules of law and reason, and to engage with the life of the immediate local context within which one operates but also to move to another place as required. Serving common good is part of the Stoics morality and movement beyond one's polis becomes clearly associated with the cosmopolitanism thinking. In recent scholarship, cosmopolitanism has also been associated with an ethical way of being in harmony and commitment to the common good and strive for a better world (Sobré–Denton and Bardhan, 2013). Critics (e.g., Schmitt already in 1963) however associate cosmopolitanism with going too far to the other direction and abolishing the 'political' entity formed under the nation state. The implications of this for social order are also part of the debate.

4 On strategy, see Swidler, 1986 and Bourdieu's habitus

3

ASPECTS OF THE MODERN WORKPLACE

This chapter turns its gaze to the work/place and aims to provide a context for the cases that follow. The concept of 'work' is changing and the boundaries between work and non-work spaces, times, and activities have already become blurred. The very concept of *a* work place is out of sync with the complexity of the labour market. What counts as 'work space' and the implications for negotiating shared practice is critically important. Although, for workplace discourse analysts, 'the organisation' often remains under-theorised, it provides the context within which employees operate and negotiate identities as organisational practices. I am particularly interested in the language of the multilingual workplace and the association with organisational culture in the way it was framed in Chapter 2. This chapter is organised in seven sections and concludes with revisiting the concept of practice before moving to the methodological part of the book.

3.1 Profiling the modern workplace

"In our world we discover fluctuations, bifurcations, and instabilities at all levels."
(Prigogine, 1997: 55)

The modern workplace, also commonly labelled neoliberal, post–Fordist, post–bureaucratic, or post–capitalist (Drucker, 1993), has been rapidly changing over the past few decades. Organisations have turned multinational and multilingual and organise activity around teams cutting across areas of expertise and experience. Although this may sound like a truism for large firms and their subsidiaries in different parts of the world, a closer look shows that the same applies to many organisations irrespective of size, sector, or geographical location. In fact, recent research

shows that categories such as large/small or local/global are relatively narrow and fail to capture the fluid nature of the way organisations operate. In this section I am starting with a brief discussion on neoliberalism and I will also address the notions of globalisation and mobility.

The use of the term 'neoliberalism' has become widespread in ICC and workplace discourse literature as well as in every day discourses but more often than not it is left open for the reader to delimit. It typically comes with negative connotations and has become a shorthand for any of the effects of the capitalist model on the individual.

Neoliberalism is primarily associated with a political and economic movement which promotes the free mobility of people, capital, and skills. As with the well-known 19th-century *laissez-faire* movement which promoted the free market and non-interference of the state and claimed that wellbeing can derive from removing barriers to the market flow, associating the economy with a self-adjusting ecosystem, neoliberalism also comes with a discourse of balance and natural order which is, allegedly, beneficial for both the individual and organisations as a whole. This discourse is prevalent in the modern workplace which, in the last few decades, has changed drastically. The specifics of the change, evidently, depend on the different localities and the characteristics of the relevant various political and economic contexts within which organisations operate. However, research (e.g., Brown et al., 2009; Sparks et al., 2001) foregrounds the changing nature of the domain of work across boundaries, national and professional. Changes that are widely reported include a radical shift from a 'job for life' to more temporary forms of employment. This is also related to an increased number of different types of jobs employees are expected to take in the course of their working lives. Moving from permanent/full time to temporary also comes with a change in working hours and, as expected, flexibility from the part of the employees. The latter is significant as it results in and triggers a need for the (constant) remake of professional self and professional life (see Giddens, 1991 on self as a reflexive project).

Particularly in the context of the European Union which is the focus of my research, words such as 'flexicurity' (flexibility and security in the job market) are becoming widespread and indicate the change in the way professional activity is organised and remunerated. In the same vein, discourses on work–life balance are also particularly interesting in constructing a boundary between 'home' and 'work' which, in practice, is becoming increasingly blurred. And while 'life' in this context is taking place outside or after work, policy documents associate emotional wellbeing to flexibility of work time and work performance. Also, the increased number of temporary workers, the stress on resources and pressure on reducing collective agreements, the effect of the financial crises on unemployment, and the in/equalities of accessing the labour marker contribute to a *widespread commodification* of human activity and make the crossing of boundaries (in/out) of work complex.

Most work environments have turned into webs of activity that span across borders, constantly renewing themselves. Transitions and transition points, be it from

employment to unemployment, from labour market A to labour market B, from education to the workplace and so on, are becoming more frequent for all population groups (Ecclestone et al., 2010; Bradley and Devadason, 2008). The increase of coaching and facilitating structures for employees to self-manage this changing landscape indicates the new managerial practices where the responsibility for performance has cascaded and shifted from the hierarchical 'top' of the past to the level of the team and the individual. ~~Consequently,~~ the work-related *task* is also becoming more complex and requires employees from different backgrounds and with different competences to work together in carrying out their daily agendas (Webber and Donahue, 2001; Ely and Thomas, 2001).

Not surprisingly, then, modern workplaces are also turning into highly collaborative environments (Earley and Gibson, 2002: 1). Given the expertise needed and the nature of most of the tasks the employees undertake, working effectively with colleagues and learning from colleagues is an important part of people's daily routines (Earley and Gibson, 2002; Zarifian, 1996). Well put by Zarifian (1996: 14 ff.), the reasons for having people work together in modern environments are equally important to those which kept people apart in the past. He argues that there are two versions of cooperation, the first being the weak version where 'work' is divided among employees and presupposes that each employee and/or group of employees have clear responsibilities. The channels of communication are open between the various groups in order to achieve a better coordination of the groups and their work. In the strong version, however, cooperation equals 'working together' and communication plays a key role as employees have to establish reciprocal rapport and continuously co-construct organisational knowledge in order to achieve their individual and team goals. In most environments employees must adopt the latter, strong version, and this clearly affects the way 'things are getting done at work'. Further to this, new organisational structures involve adopting a flat model which is built around the work of teams instead of the vertical hierarchies of the past. This is in line with the tendency reported in the literature towards a structure that reduces the layers of management (and associated costs). While the traditional hierarchy model has been represented as a pyramid, a flat structure system is one where the layers between the top and the base are lean. This means that management cost and accountability is on the teams themselves rather than one individual or level.

The increased complexity of tasks also underscores the importance of training the workforce to respond to the demands of the environment. ~~Hence,~~ the promotion of ongoing learning is widely acknowledged as one of the ways companies can meet the increasing demands of the new era. Since 1995 the EU (White paper, 1995 and later ECSGET, 1997) has suggested that work-oriented learning has "an increased role to play in relation to the development of companies which increasingly depend on their human capital" (White paper, 1995: 50). Learning and training ~~in this context is~~ skills and services oriented.

This orientation however does not apply only at the level of the company or individual organisation, the emphasis on 'knowledge economy' clearly reflects the

new way the economic activity is conceptualised. The term itself is used in different ways and, just as an indication, on the British Academy site the reader finds the following:

> Ideas, innovation and knowledge are the key drivers of modern economies. Their role, says the OECD "as compared with natural resources, physical capital and low skill labour, has taken on greater importance. Although the pace may differ, all OECD economies are moving towards a knowledge-based economy".
>
> *(British Academy, 2014: n.d.)*

Recent policy documents of supranational federations echo this. For instance the strategic goal of the European Union (2000) is to become "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world" (ibid: 3) with the key element in achieving this being the investment in human capital in the following ways: a) the provision of on-going learning opportunities to all citizens whether within or outside the official educational system, b) the "promotion of employability and c) social inclusion through investment in citizens' knowledge and competences; d) the creation of an information society for all and e) the fostering of mobility" (ibid: 6). This was reconfirmed in the Lisbon Strategy for the period of 2000–2010, and the Europe 2020 strategy. The documents state that the strategic aim is to turn the EU into "a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion" (2010: 5). Despite the changes in the socio-political context within and outside the EU at the time of writing, the overall discourse on skills and knowledge is not expected to change.

The new structures show a deep change in the way we conceptualise work. And in its turn this new conceptualisation of work feeds back into and shapes the broader environment in a constant spiral of interrelated influences. Looking closer to the dynamics of change, if we shift the focus from the *organisation* as a static entity to *organising* (Weick, 2009) as an evolving process and the practices associated with it, we can then best capture the fluidity and complexity of change in the workplace.

Change (Burnes, 2004; Luecke, 2003; To Bonem By, 2005) in any organisation or professional setting, cannot be reduced to one and is a constant rather than a concrete event situated in space and time (see complexity theory Section 9.2). There is little theoretical engagement with the concept of change as linguistically enacted and negotiated in relation to organisational processes. At the same time the linguistic turn in organisation studies (Angouri and Piekkari, 2017) has argued that language shapes organisational reality rather than simply mirrors it. This is in line with the work of workplace discourse analysts and the social constructionist turn in social sciences. From this point of view, the organisation emerges in and through discourse; accordingly, stability and change coexist as actors negotiate their realities in routine activities at work.

3.2 The organisation as a discursive construct

Discourse[1] scholars make a convincing case for going beyond the organisation as a pre-existent body that defines the activities of those associated with it. Sharing the view that an organisation is constructed through and in discourse, research has addressed the complex processes by which the workplace is being reconstructed and redefined through micro and macro discourses (e.g., Bargiela-Chiappini, 2009). From this perspective an organisation talks[2] itself into being (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984) and perpetuates or resists dominant ideologies and rhetoric. Representing employees as *human resource*, *capital,* or *skill sets*, for instance, presupposes and projects a particular identity which depersonalises and dehumanises individuals. Already in 1996, Gee et al. provided an insightful analysis of the dominant discourses constituting the modern neoliberal workplace. Work by Fairclough (1992, 1995), Gee et al. (1996), Sarangi and Roberts (1999), Sarangi and Slembrouck (1996), and more recently Iedema and Scheeres (2003) and Iedema (2003) also make a convincing case on the ways organisation is constructed in and through discourse and the relationship between policy and practice.

Despite differences between the different DA traditions, discourse is commonly understood as meaning making practices.

As put by Iedema (2003: 20):

> Discourse is the hypothetical total of possibilities of making meaning that I and others around me consider to have at our disposal, with all its (il)logics, incongruities, disjunctions and contradictions.

Critical discourse analysts (see Wodak, 1996; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2011) have provided with an understanding of the dialectal relationship between individual reality and the broader societal structures as well as the constant reshaping of one another. In the widely cited definition, Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 258) succinctly argue:

> Describing discourse as a social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it: The discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it.

Although meaning making involves, partly, some shared understanding of context, this does not make discourses static. To the contrary, discourses operate in complex ways. The interactants attribute and negotiate meaning by drawing on sets of available inferential frameworks. These are, normatively, *assumed* to be shared with

other members of groups or communities people are or aspire to be part of. There is nothing prescriptive or deterministic in this assumption. A statement along the lines of '[Company name] is an equal opportunities employer' can afford a set of meanings the interactants draw upon when the text is mobilised in the context of specific work-related events. So in the context of an organisation, a diversity discourse, as an example, takes meaning by the context in which it emerges: the employees and their own individual and collective agendas and the linguistic means these agents share as they operate in their daily context. Each individual in the group has a different understanding of the organisation's diversity agenda, what is legal and what is morally 'right' or 'wrong'. The process of negotiation leads to a reinforcement OR scrutiny of the status quo in a particular moment in time. The outcome of the event where the interaction took place, which may be spoken or written, is open to further scrutiny by other relevant agents and so on.

The process of meaning negotiation clearly depends and scrutinises the hierarchy and power (im)balance, inherent in any setting. A bit further to this, although the modern workplace claims to promote an open, flat, and 'democratic' way to organise human activity, does not mean to say that hierarchies are not visible and/or indexed in workplace contexts. To the contrary, in any local context, the distribution of power is, to a greater or lesser extent, known or visible to those who are part of the system. These relationships however are enacted in discourse and are multifactorial and multilayered. The way power is negotiated in the local context of a team and the broader organisational level is also relevant to the way the modern workplace has shifted the power and control from the top level of the organisation towards the team. In the post-bureaucratic organisation (Iedema, 2003) control is enacted in a complex matrix of relationships between co-workers. In this context, it is not the top management issuing directives but the employee is expected to monitor and control the self as part of the process of equal participation in organisational life. As well put by Iedema (2003: 12) "the participation ethos radically reconstitutes work (and the worker): from being surveilled from above, work is now increasingly about surveillance from within and by itself (herself) as it (she) talks about itself (herself)".

To conclude this point, in the postmodern view of the workplace, the organisation is emergent and maintains its structure through the work of its agents (employees) who operate on the basis of their own local/individual agendas rather than the deterministic control of the past. This does not mean that the organisation is 'fluid' in the eyes of the individual. ~~To the contrary,~~ In everyday practice and at any one moment in time the built environment as well as the capital of an organisation is tangible and visible. Each of these moments also constructs and reconstructs the organisation and affects its present and future. In the next section I explore further a particular aspect of the modern workplace, the commitment to its diversity agenda. This is particularly relevant to essentialist meanings of culture which proliferate in professional settings as well as the politics of difference discussed earlier (see also Part 3).

3.3 Equality – Diversity in the global workplace

One of the many implications of the changing workplace is that the boundaries between personal and professional life and work and social domains are becoming increasingly blurred. In this context the employees work in various team contexts and for long hours with co-workers who they may perceive as different in more than one ways. Maintaining good relationships in the workplace has always been important given that the domain of work occupies a significant percentage of one's day time and good relationships are related to productivity and wellbeing (Holmes and Stubbe, 2015). Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009: 102) use the term 'rapport' "to refer to people's subjective perceptions of (dis)harmony, smoothness-turbulence and warmth-antagonism in interpersonal relations". As the workplace becomes more diverse, however, rapport management becomes more complex and the employees' perception of normativity, appropriateness and overall code of conduct become more visible and negotiated. Personal ideologies interact with the hegemonic discourses that dominate any professional setting and bear implications for self/other positioning and the overall cohesion of the group.

At the same time, the modern workplace claims to be egalitarian and democratic, and to promote equity[3] and protect diversity (Budd, 2004; Estlund, 2003; Rothschild, 2009). These are ideological claims and researchers have criticised the even metaphoric use of democracy in relation to workplace governance where the points of reference are related to managerial control and economic activity. The ideal of the democratic workplace is certainly not new either- we can trace it back to ancient Greek times (e.g., Ober, 2008; Rothschild and Whitt, 1986) for instance. At the same time there is no doubt that the workplace is not a place of equal representation and equity, if indexes such as equity of pay, participation in decision making, and career progression are anything to go by (Blau and Kahn, 2007; Blackaby et al., 2005). Cheney argued a while back "one of the great ironies of the modern world is that democracy, imperfect as it is in the political realm, seldom extends to the workplace" (1995: 167). Despite these caveats, diversity and equality agendas proliferate and are acquiring increased visibility. Diversity, in the neoliberal rhetoric, has been associated with more 'efficient' workplaces and with increased productivity which clearly makes it a very appealing opportunity for any organisation (on issues of commodification see Section 3.6).

In order to better understand the various levels of equality discourses at work, the overarching environment, including relevant legal frames are important. I refer to the EU and mainly the UK context as this constitutes my main research domain. At EU level, the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam allowed the Commission to "take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation". In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 replaced the earlier pieces of legislation including the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Equality Act distinguishes between different forms of discrimination as follows:

- Direct discrimination – treating someone with a protected characteristic less favourably than others

- Indirect discrimination – putting rules or arrangements in place that apply to everyone, but that put someone with a protected characteristic at an unfair disadvantage
- Harassment – unwanted behaviour linked to a protected characteristic that violates someone's dignity or creates an offensive environment for them
- Victimisation – treating someone unfairly because they've complained about discrimination or harassment (Government Equalities Office, 2015).

The law refers to 'protected characteristics' which involve:

- Age
- Being or becoming a transsexual person
- Being married or in a civil partnership
- Being pregnant or having a child
- Disability
- Race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- Religion, belief or lack of religion/belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation (Government Equalities Office, 2015)

As it becomes evident, the Act positions people, and in our case employees, in a range of social categories in which one either belongs or not on the basis of a set of predetermined characteristics. While this is clearly important in providing a frame and protection, the law is translated into policy documents which underpin the work of HR (human resources) departments and inform managerial practice. Law and policy evidently go hand in hand or 'hand in glove' (Cappelli et al., 1997). This however is not enough for protecting individual rights. Policy documents in the workplace have been associated with maintaining an environment of equality and transparency for employees (Segovia-San-Juan et al., 2017; Tejeda, 2006). However, the documents themselves are not a means to an end or the main actors; the interpretation and implementation depends on the specifics of each setting. Policy documents put forward a set of discourses which afford various meanings and are negotiated in situ. An inclusive environment goes beyond introducing relevant policies only; it presupposes a commitment throughout the organisation and particularly from senior employees who are particularly visible and influential in their micro- and meso-contexts as well as from teams that negotiate these discourses in every day practices. Further to this, in any organisation, meaning is negotiated locally and in relation to the communities one is member of. This involves a dialogue between the micro context of the individual and the dominant power structures within which the employees operate.

Terms such as 'diversity management' have been related to the 'advantage' of difference mainly associated with multinational large corporate companies. Following a trend in the US in the 80s, the commodification of difference – where difference is becoming something tangible and profitable for the organisation – diversity agendas can now be found on the website of many if not most private or public

workplaces. In this context, the widely cited *business case* for diversity (e.g., Robinson and Dechant, 1997) and the representation of the equality agenda as *apolitical* and outside the context of power relationships has been criticised for serving the interests of the workplace (instead of the individual). In the core of the criticism is the oversimplification but also the regularisation of identity and the way in which the focus is on the individual in an ahistorical/apolitical way. Despite the need to achieve greater equity, in an environment that is becoming increasingly demanding, this cannot be achieved without focusing on the workplace and society as a whole. Along with moving the emphasis from the group to a list of distinct characteristics also comes a shift in locating diversity to the single individual.

This assumes that a) diversity has not always been part of human societies – and by extension workplaces – and separates it from the power equilibrium inherent in any form of social organisation. b) Diversity becomes a commodity that can be 'managed', assessed in financial terms and the solution to improving performance. c) By perpetuating a certain set of differences and ways to manage them, stereotypical representations of individuals and groups become, yet again, prevalent. For instance, workshops are provided for junior managers to work 'effectively' with diverse teams where diversity is not a 'problem' but is 'celebrated' and linked to productivity and efficiency. In discourses of 'efficiency' that proliferate, the ideals of harmony, team cohesion, and inclusiveness are associated with diversity and presented as neutral and apolitical (Prause and Mujtaba, 2015; Rana, 2013; Zanoni et al., 2010).

As an example, if we take a look at the case of a symbolic company, McDonalds, chosen simply because it often stands for globalisation and mobility, the website[4] states:

> At McDonald's we are moving from awareness to action. Our goal is to have people within our organization working and living to reach their full potential. We believe that leaders hold themselves accountable for learning about, valuing, and respecting individuals on both sides of the counter. At McDonald's, diversity and inclusion are part of our culture – from the crew room to the Board Room. We are working to achieve this goal every day by creating an environment for everyone to contribute their best.

A range of macro discourses mobilised here. The reader is presented with the image of a company where employees are invited to take ownership of their own activities and development, despite a clear us (the organisation) and they (the employees). Diversity is juxtaposed to inclusion, culture, value, and respect and associated with a clear commitment to the company. The commodification of diversity and equality where the right to an inclusive workplace is measured with economic terms and gain for everybody is also part of the same narrative.

This, evidently, is not to say that diversity itself is not important nor does it mean that professional organisations should not take stock, assess, and improve current practice. The relationship between policy and practice is, however, far from

straightforward. Diversity and inclusiveness happen in and through organisational practices and routines. Dominant workplace discourses reflect the ideals of the wider environment where identities are still sites of oppression and power imbalance.

Diversity documents vary but typically draw on binary categories and around polarised and dichotomous notions of complex concepts (e.g., men/women, Christian/Muslim, homo/heterosexuality, and so on). This is inherently limited. Identities are not monolithic concepts and policies referring to them in terms of opposites (e.g., *either* 'young' or 'old') reduce and can essentialise the complex reality of identity construction (Valentine, 1993; Angouri, 2015). Further to this, if we accept that identity construction is more than *haves* or *have nots*, then it is easy to understand the criticism towards diversity agendas for an essentialistic and oversimplified way for representing the individual (Holmes, 2006; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003).

Work on intersectionality (e.g., Acker, 2006; Crenshaw, 1995; McCall, 2005), which has influenced feminist studies significantly (e.g., Brah and Phoenix, 2004), convincingly argues that individuals are positioned in more than one category simultaneously. So an employee may be placed in the category, as an example, 'woman' as well as 'young', 'old', 'black', 'white', 'non-native speaker', and so on. Diversity cannot be understood without addressing the complexity of identity work. This idea is not new in the linguistic world and, despite differences in terminology, post-structuralist scholarship takes a critical view on static diversity policies emphasising instead the "multitude of dynamic power relations and the historically and socially constituted mosaic of intersecting differences" (Metcalfe and Wood-hams, 2012: 134).

Hence in the context of the complex workplace, a convincing case is made for the need of scholarship to reconceptualise the ways in which policies are framed and their implications for the employees' routines and daily activities. Policies in relation to language and language use at work also are subject to similar issues.

3.4 Multilingualism at work

A relevant aspect to the process of negotiating membership to the organisation as well as daily activities and routines is the linguistic varieties available in particular settings. The fact that the majority of the planet is multilingual is by now a truism. The way the term is used and the way we conceptualise the multilingual speaker, however, has come under scrutiny recently.

Moving away from seeing language as a stable 'thing', current work addresses the multifaceted relationship between language and social justice as well as the impact of major changes in population flows through migration and the changing workplace. The widely used term 'superdiversity' (Vertovec, 2007), and others such as 'complex diversity', constitutes an attempt to represent an unprecedented level of coming in contact with difference and its impact on language use. This is the focus of the next section.

3.5 A complex linguistic landscape

In most professional settings, a range of languages coexist on daily basis to meet the employees' and business needs. The multilingual nature of the world of work has been reported in the literature since the late 70s. Back then, multilingualism at work had not attracted enough attention from either organisation studies or International Business (IB) scholars or linguists. For the former, the significance of language as practice and the relationship between talking and doing had not acquired prominence, while for the latter multilingualism and language diversity had been particularly visible but not in the domain of the workplace. The landscape has changed quite radically over the last thirty years. A number of special issues (see e.g., Angouri, 2014; Piekkari and Tietze, 2011), dedicated conferences panels, and projects (e.g., DYLAN) have specifically aimed to go above a description of the multilingual reality which is by now accepted as the everyday practice for many employees irrespective of industry or size of company. In the neoliberal workplace where mobility and globalisation of business activities are key priorities, access to language and the ability to operate at the interface of a range of different languages has been suggested as capital and resource that differentiates the 'managers' from the 'international managers' (e.g., Tietze, 2008). It is the case that employees have been forced to not use their L1 either directly or indirectly (Lippi-Green, 1997). Currently, and certainly in international white-collar spaces, the employees' multilingual capital (in a Bourdieusian sense) is seen more and more as an asset mobilised for the profit/benefit of the organisation.

This linguistic diversity posed, and still poses, a dilemma for the organisations in which communication has to be 'handled' in ways that are different to a notionally monolingual environment. In this context a range of strategies have started being introduced. These range from: − working with translators and interpreters to − using multilingual employees as 'nodes' to internally translate and interpret to − allowing different language clusters to operate alongside each other to imposing one –common language. The latter being very common and popular as it meets the dominant ideals of control and accountability. These so called strategies have been well discussed in literature and have been associated with issues of power and control, particularly in relation to gatekeeping and decision making (Gunnarsson, 2009; Vaara, 1999)

The role of global languages, in which English occupies a prominent position, have acquired increased significance and value for accessing and progressing in the workplace. Hence a number of studies recently addressed the relationship between global and local languages (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005) and the equilibrium between them (Mahili, 2014). In the context of the modern workplace, where the managerial control has moved from the direct hierarchies of the past to the level of the team (Iedema, 2003), standardisation of language use is allowing the control of business activities and practices from within the team and by the individual themselves.

Introducing, however, one common language is certainly not a simple operational decision and a lot of good literature in IB has addressed the complexity of

the matter (Piekkari et al., 2014). Language is more than a mere medium of information exchange, as discourse studies argue we talk ourselves into being (Heritage, 2005) and this involves social and professional identities that are relevant to organisational practices and agendas. I have argued elsewhere (Angouri, 2013) that the workplace cannot and does not operate on the basis of one language, be it a global one or any other, even from a neoliberal profit perspective. Hence the introduction of 'one language' policy does not turn the workplace monolingual. Far from it. Language policy documents provide a frame within which language practices take place, but the different teams, departments, and individuals interpret these policies in the reality of their local context.

Introducing one common has been seen a way to manage and 'standardise' corporate culture (Ang and Massingham, 2007). 'Standardisation' however is a quite ambiguous concept. Introducing one corporate language has implications of the way daily practices are managed and also involves privileging one linguistic practice over another. This will unavoidably "create superiority–inferiority relationships between the people belonging or not belonging to the group that shares the language and the culture symbolised by it" (Vaara et al., 2005: 602). Similarly, Gal (2009) argues that language has traditionally served as a key technology to differentiate between individuals viewed as legitimate members of an imagined 'us' and an imagined 'other' and to produce hierarchies among the 'us' and the 'other'.

Already in the late 90s (Marschan–Piekkari et al., 1999) the difficulties associated with operating in a language that is not a dominant one for business activities had been convincingly argued (see also Angouri and Miglbauer, 2014). Understanding language use as *acting* and *enacting* the world allows a window in the complexity of having to operate at the interface of linguistic borders for both task related and social aspects of the world of work.

Workplace research has shown the direct relationship between language use and the power equilibrium. Having access to the dominant language/s of any workplace is directly associate with integration and wellbeing at work, from a social perspective, but also with the ability to participate in decision making and career progress. Gunnarsson (2014) has ~~ago~~ argued that the widespread use of English in the workplace raises issues of participation and challenges the democratic ideal. From a different perspective, Blazejewski (2006) and Barner–Rasmussen and Aarnio (2011) also argued on the uneven distribution of language 'competence' throughout the organisation and the implications for the management of business activities. And Piekkari et al. (2005) have also argued on the 'glass ceiling' faced by employees not having access the main resources used in a professional environment.

As companies move from a top-down to a horizontal structure, where the emphasis is on the performance of the team, new communication contexts and needs emerge (Angouri, 2013). It is, for example, common for teams to have to perform frequent and significant events, such as business meetings, using virtual spaces and online platforms. It is also common for employees to participate in various teams, each of which has its own linguistic footprint. This new reality forces the employees to operate at the interface of multiple languages in order to achieve their goals at work.

Hence attempting to capture this linguistic ecosystem of the different settings involves the study of various components which I illustrate in Figure 3.1 (see also Angouri and Piekkari, 2017).

This matrix, evidently a simplification, attempts to show how language use is subject to a process of negotiation between the interactants, and can only be understood with reference to a particular context at a certain moment in time and in relation to the agency of the core actors involved in an encounter.

At the same time, slicing language use in micro/meso/macro levels is a construct super-imposed by the analyst given that individuals always interact in a whole. I find it useful however at this stage in order to visualise that interaction takes place in a complex system. Accordingly language use and language choice also need to be understood in a dynamic and multilayered way (cf. Chapter 6 and Figure 8.1 in 8.4.5).

Further to this, it has been common for linguistic and international business research to understand 'language' as national language. Hence a multilingual speaker for years stood for a speaker who has access to various different linguistic varieties, which are understood as separate entities. However taking the 'nation' as the unit for exploring language (and culture for that matter) is limited as we have already seen. Associating a language with a political entity such as a nation–state and considering a national variety as 'the' language of a country is a political decision and not a linguistic one. Studies in language standardisation and post-colonialism have a lot to say on that (work by Fishman, 1972; Coulmas, 1988; Oakes, 2001 among many others) and the politics of 'one language = one culture = one nation' nationalist rhetoric have been well discussed.

A colonial ideology of the nation state and its 'one' language as the 'proper' variety has attracted criticism in sociolinguistic scholarship over the years. Relevant
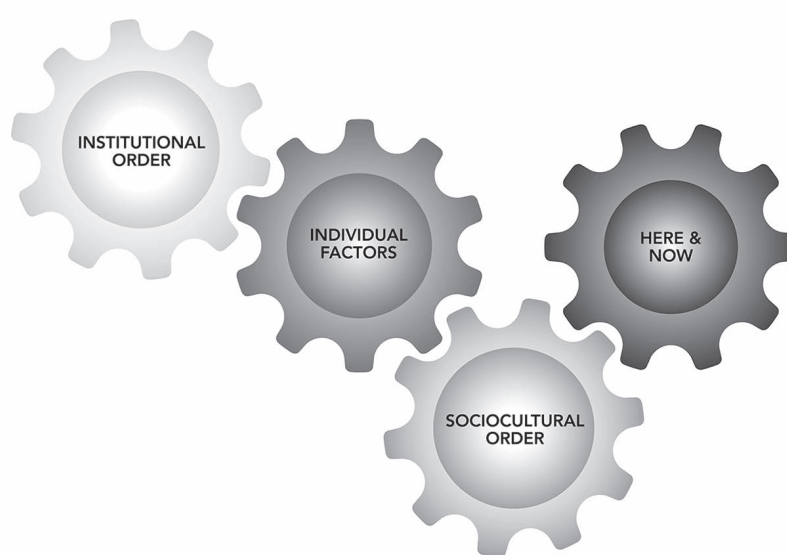
FIGURE 3.1 The interplay of factors influencing language choice

here to retain that the 'one' language, comes with a canon of what is appropriate and correct behaviour which is still visible in powerful social evaluations associated with different language varieties. Already in 1985 Le Page and Tabouret-Keller in their work succinctly argue "once the system has achieved some degree of autonomy in people's thinking it can be both reified and totemised – that is, it can be made into an object, and given iconic status" (1985: 236). The concept of totemization is well placed to capture the significance of the imaginary for defining a group in first order narratives. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller refer to a "repertoire of socially marked systems" (1985: 116) as a perception of language by the individual speaker and they continue, saying that "each system is a property with which he has endowed a group which he himself [sic] perceives" (1985: 116).

Since the turn of the century, one can find a range of new terms in the applied and sociolinguistic studies. These terms attempt to move away from the *language* as a static entity which some have and some don't. In line with the notion of fluidity and the various competences needed for the tasks people face, language use is not best approached as a monolithic concept. As an illustration, Canagarajah (2009, 2013) uses the 'meshing' of codes to challenge the notion of separating and prioritising linguistic varieties. He also refers to trans-lingual practices (Canagarajah, 2013) to capture the work speakers do in actively mobilising a varied linguistic repertoire in order to achieve interactional goals. Language practice goes beyond distinct (national) varieties putting emphasis on hybridity and language choice (Canagarajah, 2013). Other terms such as 'flexible multilingualism' (Li Wei, 2011) or 'metrolingualism' (Otsuji and Pennycook, 2010), and the widely used 'superdiversity' (Vertovec, 2007), also point to the notion of languages in flux and the limitations of equating 'language' bounded to national territory.

Although studies have addressed societal multilingualism for some time now, we still need a better understanding of the practices in the multilingual workplace. The phenomena discussed here are not new. The intensity of the activity and the level of change, however, require a different treatment; one that allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of language practice, perceptions of language competence and language needs. Recent studies have shown the range of languages used in any given workplace and the need for new theoretical tools that capture these realities has been raised. Drawing to the notion of the linguistic ecosystem (Haugen, 1972), which although not new is gaining more attention, allows to put the spotlight on the complexity of the systems in any workplace setting. Language at work is a powerful way for "normative modes of talking" (Duchêne et al., 2013: 1) to become resources for distinguishing between groups and for influencing selection, mobility, gatekeeping, and so on. Workplace language/s are taken for granted resources which are being commodified in policy documents and everyday practice.

Appadurai's (1986: 13) description of commodification as "the situation in which [an object's] exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature", is particularly useful in unpacking the ways in which language at work in constructed in policy documents. Commodification captures

the process of attributing commercial (economic) value to goods or services that were never originally intended to be bought and sold, turning them into or treating them as mere commodities. This is in line with the wider process of translating (and reducing) the complex whole of 'education' to skills and competences.

3.6 Commodification of language and knowledge

Already in early 90s the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee of the Commission of the European Communities (IRDAC, 1991) suggested that the lack of experts in the domains of technology and foreign languages[5] is one of the most significant reasons why unemployment is still very high in certain geographical areas, industrial sectors, and minority groups within the European Union. That is related to the reasons used by European Union policy documents to promote the importance of education being driven by social and economic changes since 1995 (White Paper, 1995).

At the same time, the EU has also foregrounded the importance of lifelong learning for all citizens. Following the work initiated at Lisbon (2000) and Stockholm (2001) the emphasis in dominant discourses shifted "from knowledge acquisition to competence development" (COM 116, 2001: 5). According to the Lisbon European Council (2000), the basic skills EU citizens should have in order to be able to participate in all aspects of life have been modified and upgraded due to current socioeconomic changes (SEC 1832, 2000: 10). The list of basic skills is long and not surprisingly includes among others foreign language skills. The same document also clearly states that "learning foreign languages involves acquiring technical, cultural and aesthetic capacities for communication, performance and appreciation" (2000: 10), but it does not suggest that foreign language skills constitute a new adjunct to the list of basic skills one should acquire. Instead, they "become more important for many more people than in the past" (ibid: 11). In the context of these discourses, 'language knowledge' is understood as a series of skills and competences that carry specific economic capital (Wodak and Krzyzanowski, 2011).

This needs to be understood in relation to the very concept of learning which has been modified and accordingly "learning how to learn, to adapt to change and to make sense of vast information flows are now generic skills that everyone should acquire" (ibid). Learning is becoming an 'ongoing' requirement and part of the long list of *soft skills* that employers seem to prefer when recruiting new talent. The 'soft' metaphor is an ideological label which is applied generously to any non-technical skill and is widely used in dominant HR discourses and employability agendas. It is, however, a problematic position and one that operationalises workplace practice as hard or soft distinguishing between interpersonal skills (soft) and subject skills (hard): an unfounded and problematic divide.

In the current context, the ability to learn is associated with skills acquisition and adaptation to change. The concept of adapting is becoming increasingly important given that new skills are generally promoted as needed; just as an example, social media literacy has significantly affected professional practice. Hence employees need

to adapt their skills to the practices of their local environment. Further to the latter, research on workplace discourse has also shown that employees who are unaccustomed to working collaboratively and to dealing with/learning from feedback from others may run into difficulties in terms of adapting to the demands of the workplace and in terms of furthering their professional development (Schneider and Andre, 2005; Freedman and Adam, 2000). In sum, employees are asked to learn to learn (see Beaufort, 2006 for a discussion) from their colleagues and from their working environment ; on the one hand employees acquire/develop new skills via (work-related) training, and on the other they have to learn workplace-specific practices from colleagues. At the same time learning on the job includes a whole range of activities, it comes with 'learning targets' or 'professional development plans' and is measurable and often assessed against specific performance criteria.

In so far as language is concerned, the same applies; language use is a gatekeeping mechanism directly related to the power equilibrium in the different workplace settings. So it is not the knowledge of the language in and by itself but the capital of specific languages in context. Language use is specific to the practices of each workplace. Sociolinguistic literature has repeatedly shown the importance of acquiring the "interactional regimes" (Blommaert et al., 2005) of a particular environment (Roberts and Sarangi, 1999). The 'intercultural' and 'multilingual' encounters are negotiated locally by employees within a web of power relationships, historicities, and role performances. The relevance of language capital (see, on Bourdieu, Section 3.7) have been discussed under the terms 'linguistic penalty' (Roberts and Campbell, 2006) and 'social justice' (Piller, 2016). These studies show that not talking in institutionally 'appropriate' (hegemonic) ways results in a penalty which emanates from a mismatch of expectations rather than fluency in the language per se. The individual experience of the complex multilingual reality goes beyond a list of skills and competences and is more accurately described as *in flux*. This requires a more dynamic understanding of language use, one that goes beyond associating knowledge of language with traditional ideals of competence. I discuss this further in the next section.

3.6.1 Competence

Competence is typically associated with a set 'skills' that one has or developed through learning and training. Cultural competence in particular is associated, amongst others, with handling 'difference'. Although the symbiotic relationship between language and culture is taken as given in most theoretical approaches, issues of language have been, until recently, peripheral in ICC literature (Zhu Hua, 2014). The aim of this section is to discuss the notion of *communicative competence* which is at the very heart of meaning making/sharing processes and to argue for a locally enacted, situated approach to competence.

In recognition of the fact that language use requires much more than the ability to understand and produce grammatically correct sentences, the term 'communicative competence' has become increasingly widespread since its introduction by

Hymes in 1964 (Canale, 1983). Hymes developed the notion of communicative competence in his objection to, the then Chomskian (1965) view that language competence consists solely of the ability to form any and all of the grammatical sentences of a language. Hymes believed Chomsky's view was inadequate because it included only knowledge of grammatical rules and said nothing about the conditions of use in which those rules were applied in order to communicate and to interpret linguistic messages. Chomsky (1965: 3 ff.) stated:

> Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker–listener, in a completely homogenous speech–community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions [. . .] we thus make a fundamental distinction between competence [. . .] and performance [. . .] In actual fact, it [performance] obviously could not directly reflect competence. A record of natural speech will show numerous false starts, deviations from rules, changes of plan in mid–course, and so on.

Chomsky's influential work has been problematised by many over the years and is still debated in the relevant circles. The issue for sociolinguists and anthropologists has been that the linguistic study should include not only grammaticality but also appropriateness and acceptability in sociolinguistic situations. According to Hudson (1980: 19), Chomsky's views lead to a theory of linguistics which is essentially incomplete. At least four problems have been raised in relation to Chomsky's statement: a) "An ideal speaker-listener" b) "a completely homogenous speech community" c) perfect knowledge of language, and d) language which is "unaffected by grammatically irrelevant conditions". Gumperz (1971: 101), for example, points out that "there are no a priori grounds which force us to define speech communities so that all members speak the same language".

Hymes (1972; 1965) proposed that, in addition to competence and performance, there is another dimension of language acquisition: "From a communicative standpoint, judgments of appropriateness may not be assignable to different spheres, as between the linguistic and the cultural; certainly the spheres of the two will intersect" (p. 286). He therefore introduced the term 'communicative competence' which can be broadly defined as what a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community. The relevance with the norms of a community or group of people is evident. Hymes believed that a person who is member of a (speech) community knows not only what to say but also, "when to speak, when not and what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner" (Hymes, 1972: 277). Consequently, "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (1972: 278).

Saville-Troike (1982: 22 ff.) in her influential work on *ethnography of communication* also argues that communicative competence involves knowing both the language code and the applied social norms of the society for any given situation. She argues that the concept of communicative competence "must be embedded in the notion of cultural competence or the knowledge and skills speakers bring into

a situation" (ibid: 23). Saville–Troike states that the speakers should have a broad range of shared knowledge in order to communicate. This knowledge constitutes the basic components of communication: a) linguistic knowledge, b) interaction skills, and c) 'cultural' knowledge.

In order to study and analyse communication, an interrelated concept is that of the communicative event as the basic unit for descriptive purposes of contextualised speech (Saville–Troike, 1982: 29). The acronym SPEAKING, introduced by Hymes, is as much a mnemonic as a system of classification and useful in providing a language to talk about an event (Hymes, 1974):

- *Setting* is defined by physical conditions under which a communicative event is taking place, while *scene* relates to psychologically and culturally defined circumstances of the event.
- *Participants*, depending on their social roles and the type of communicative event, fill in the positions in one of the following combinations – speakerlistener, addressor–addressee and sender–receiver.
- *Ends* encompass both the overall expected outcomes of the event and also the individual goals of the participants.
- *Act sequence* refers to the form and content of what is being said as well as to their relationship.
- *Key*, which can be marked verbally and nonverbally, stands for the tone and manner in which the exchange of messages takes place.
- *Instrumentalities* cover the choice of the communication channel (writing, oral) and the type of speech in terms of code and style (regional dialect, formal style etc.).
- *Norms of interaction and interpretation*[6] are based on social structure and social relationships in a given community and are also related to its system of beliefs. These norms serve as guidelines in participants' interaction and interpretation of particular communicative events and exchanged messages.
- *Genre* is the term used to label various marked types of utterances that are all different from casual speech (sermon, lecture, poem etc.).

By observing and analysing a communicative event, the ethnographer of communication attempts to figure out the meaning of the event tying it eventually to its broader social and cultural context. In the same vein, a communicative event according to Saville–Troike (1982: 134) is a bounded entity of some kind for categorising communication in societies. The boundaries between each event are well defined and different behavioural norms appropriate for each kind of event.

Hymes argues that any attempt to discuss the nature of communicative competence "requires going beyond a concern with language or any language. It requires a focus on the ways in which people do use language" (Hymes, 1993: 13). Already Hymes's perspective has pointed the significance of a socially based descriptive view of the competences/skills the individuals need to acquire so as to be efficient and effective in work–related interactions. Hymes's work made a significant impact

on language teaching and learning already from late 80s and 90s (see for instance Olshtain, 1994; Bachman, 1990; Van Ek, 1986; Canale and Swain, 1981, 1980) and the relationship between the acquisition of language and sociopragmatic competence remains a debated topic in Applied Linguistics circles (e.g., Dervin, 2010).

In recent work Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) refer to symbolic *competence* as "the ability not only to approximate or appropriate for oneself someone else's language, but to shape the very context in which the language is learned and used" (2008: 664). The notion is useful to also include the negotiation of meaning where multiple points of reference coexist both in between and within language systems. This affords to capture the negotiation of meaning that traditionally falls under intercultural difference by capturing the multiple possible readings of the semiotic systems the speakers have access to. Powerful imaginaries of homogeneity – e.g., in relation to the 'corporate culture' (Section 2.10) construct – are mobilised depending on what the interactants want to achieve and indexed through symbols that carry specific meanings in context (see, on metacultural discourse, Section 6.1). Hence having access to and developing competence in the organisation's discourses involves both the use of linguistic varieties as well as hegemonic stylistic choices, and is not a purely linguistic matter but a political and ideological one.

3.7 From Bourdieu to the community of practice and back – The importance of *doing*

The relationship between language and practice is central in workplace discourse studies, with a number of scholars focusing on the language practices that distinguish between groups. This is in line with the central concept of *doing* and the emphasis on performance (Goffman) and performativity (Butler drawing on Austin and Searle) which have had a direct impact on the study of discourse in general and workplace discourse in particular.

A workplace is constituted in and through the practices of the professionals. These practices are enacted in relation to a status quo which pre-exists the individuals, but it is subjected to perpetuating or resisting it. Ways of doing are ritualised and organised in ways relevant to the norms of the group or the dominant structures in place for a long time. This however does not mean that they remain static. Bourdieu's theory of practice (1972) and the main elements of field, capital, and habitus are particularly useful in unpacking the process.

Bourdieu's habitus refers to dispositions, social conditions which are stable (but not static), "durable but not eternal" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133) and recognisable by those who claim and achieve membership to the discourses of a community. Members of a community do not have identical understanding of the habitus but share an imaginary of a shared set of norm and group homogeneity. In Bourdieu's work (1990: 54) habitus refers to the collective which operates within preexisting structures,

> the structures characterising a determinate class of conditions of existence produce the structures of the habitus, which in their turn are the basis of the

perception and appreciation of all subsequent experiences. The habitus, product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history.

The concept of habitus is directly related and in a dialectical relationship with the notions of field and capital.

People's dispositions are related to the concept of capital which in Bourdieu's sense comes in three "guises" (1986: 47): economic, cultural, and social. The first is "immediately and directly convertible into money"; the other two can be indirectly "institutionalised in the forms of" skills and qualifications (cultural capital) and connections and group membership (social capital) (Bourdieu, 1986: 47). While recent work has problematised the theoretical implications of the juxtaposition of the terms 'social' and 'capital' (e.g., Smith and Kulynych, 2002 – see earlier discussion on the democratic workplace), Bourdieu's work provides a powerful insight into language as capital and the complex relationship between communication and wealth in both tangible and intangible terms.

The concept of linguistic penalty which has been discussed in relation to marked gatekeeping events such as job interviews (see Roberts and Campbell, 2006) draws on Bourdieu's language and symbolic power (Kirilova and Angouri, 2017) and has provided useful insights in the implications of non-conformity to dominant institutional discourses and ideals. Specifically, these studies argue that candidates rejected for low-paid jobs often fail not in subject knowledge or technical skills but in the "largely hidden demands on candidates to talk in institutionally credible ways and from a mismatch of implicit cultural expectations, evidenced by mutual misunderstandings, protracted attempts to resolve them and negative judgments by interviewers" (Roberts and Campbell, 2006: 1). Language practice is critically important in how social evaluations work, it is associated with perceptions of competence and has implications on all aspects of working life.

In workplace contexts, teams develop, over time, shared and distinct ways of 'doing' and members can display and claim membership by indexing command of what differentiates 'us' from other groups. This involves all the tacit assumptions that are normalised and then taken for granted in the everyday routines and ways of carrying out work. Bourdieu's metaphor of 'fish in water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) illustrates the interrelated concept of the 'field'. This refers to the setting, a space which comes with specific rules and which provides the context for the negotiation between structure and agency. Fields are "networks of social relations, structured systems of social positions within which struggles or maneuvers take place over resources, stakes and access" (Bourdieu, 1976, 1990: 187). They reflect positions of power but are not static; positions are negotiated within the constraints of the rules of the field. Although Bourdieu's field concept is less widely discussed in relation to sociolinguistic work, I find it a particularly useful term in providing a way to combine the 'macro/micro' and 'stability/change' conceptual dualities. Bourdieu also uses the metaphor of the game and usefully illustrates the relationship between habitus, field, and capital. The field both constraints behaviour, determines 'who can do what' and provides the space for a negotiation of the agent's

understanding of the habitus. Bourdieu summarises the relationship between the three notions as follows:

$$\big[(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})\big] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$$

Bourdieu provides a conceptual framework for capturing, structure, agency, and power associated with the position speakers claim/are denied in specific (institutional) fields. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power is particularly useful for the study of culture and identity seen as organisational practice. Although Bourdieu's work is often cited in linguist research on multilingualism, workplace discourse analysts have engaged with the concept of practice through the Communities of Practice (CofP) framework which derives from the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) on the social theory of learning.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991: 98), a CofP is "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice". Similarly, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992: 464) define a CofP as:

> An aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a CofP is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages.

In his later work, Wenger (1998: 73) identifies three dimensions of a CofP which can be investigated; namely the following:

a)   what it is about – its *joint enterprise* as understood and continually renegotiated by its members;
b)   how it functions – *mutual engagement* that bind members together into a social entity;
c)   what capability it has produced – the *shared repertoire* of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artefacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time.

Wenger expands on what indexes a CofP (1998: 125–126):

1. Sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual
2. Shared ways of engaging in doing things together
3. The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation

4. Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
5. Very quick set-up of a problem to be discussed
6. Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs
7. Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise.
8. Mutually defining identities
9. The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products;
10. Specific tools, representations, and other artefacts
11. Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
12. Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones;
13. Certain styles recognised as displaying membership;
14. A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world

This, clearly, is a comprehensive set of warrants for a CofP which foreground a range of practices, some more concrete (e.g., jokes) than other (e.g., identities). What this list primarily shows is the reasons why the CofP framework has been repeatedly adopted in workplace studies as it provides a clear language to bring together the complex relationship between social structures and human agency.

As workplace talk is firmly embedded in the social and organisational context of a particular group/team on the one hand, and in the wider social or institutional order on the other (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003; see also Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson, 2002, 1999; Sarangi and Roberts, 1999; Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Harris and Bargiela-Chiappini, 1995; Boden, 1994), the study and subsequently interpretation of workplace data should be contextualised. That is, without an understanding of both the wider and the local context it is impossible to interpret and understand workplace interaction. Berger and Luckmann refer to the 'institutional order' (Berger and Luckmann, 1973: 83) and the shared knowledge – or what Berger and Luckmann (1973) has addressed under the term 'habitual practices' – inherent in, and characteristic of, any workplace environment, which "can only be understood with reference to their own history and tradition" (1973: 93). Hence, the importance of a) local and wider context, as well as b) the shared and co-constructed knowledge of any workplace, becomes evident in order to unpack the employees' perceptions of norms and practices.

CofPs have been seen to 'mediate' between the local and the global. As McElhinny argues, CofPs are "determined and constituted by their place within larger social structures" (2003: 30). And evidently all of us participate in more than one community of practice. CofPs interact, so that a number of CofPs have been soon to collectively form larger CofPs (see Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1999 for a discussion). To apply this concept to the context of the workplace, the employees of a company may participate in a number of CofPs (established work teams, for instance), which in their turn form more comprehensive CofPs (e.g., the department

of a company), and this community could in turn form a more comprehensive one (e.g., a company division), and so on.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) ideas about newcomers and old-timers, and the related concept of apprenticeship, are also relevant here. As Holmes (1999: 174) remarks, learning for Wenger is both a "natural and inevitable aspect of life", and also a "fundamentally social process". Therefore a CofP model could be seen as a way of examining a "natural method of learning which clearly resembles an apprenticeship" (1999: 174). Other researchers have also made this connection. In Swann et al. (2004: 13), for example, it is suggested that newcomers learn to participate in communities through "a process of apprenticeship" whereby they gradually become skilled at engaging in the community's norms and practices. Casanave's work (2002) is also interesting in relation to learning to participate in CofPs. Casanave, as Bourdieu did earlier, uses a game metaphor to characterise (academic) writing practices, and how writers acquire these practices. In the same way as games are "played according to rules, conventions and strategies" (Casanave, 2002: 5), any given CofP also has its own distinctive rules, conventions and strategies. 'Newcomers' or 'new players' who are unfamiliar with these practices will obviously not be able to engage in full and active participation in the life of the CofP. As Casanave argues, "players who are new to a game usually don't play well" (2002: 4) and it requires time, depending on how "willing or serious they are", to advance to expert status. Applying Casanave's game metaphor to the workplace context, it is not only a question of how familiar the players are with the game, it is also a question of a player's familiarity with the other players, i.e. the team with which they are working, what the players want to achieve – e.g., personal recognition, enjoyment of the game and so on (see also Bourdieu's game metaphor). Since the team is the heart of the organisation (see Harris, 1993) knowledge of the game includes 'fitting in' the team. But in order to fit in a specific workplace, the 'newcomer' is often expected to learn the sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic rules of linguistic and other behaviours that are specific to the said workplace. This is a process that involves negotiating the positions available to the new player and the way this is claimed by self and projected on by other.

Overall, the concept of CofP taken from a (socio)linguistics perspective has been used to unpack the process of socialisation in the discourse of a community as "becoming a member of a CofP actively interacts with the process of gaining control of the discourse of that CofP" (Holmes and Marra, 2002: 1685).

The theoretical and analytical value of the framework however has also been subject to scrutiny over the last few years (see Angouri, 2015 for an overview and discussion). Researchers have problematised the framework on two issues:

a) the juxtaposition of the notions of 'community' and 'practice' is not inherent or straightforward (Nicolini, 2012). An implication of seeing a CofP as a coherent 'whole' containing fixed practices has been problematised by others and Wegner in his 1998 book where he clearly cautions against a static understanding of the approach. A quick reading of the CofP approach may associate

the formation with homogeneity and shared views and ways. This however is not unproblematic. Lave and Wegner themselves argue that a CofP is not a "primordial culture sharing entity" (1991: 98). Despite the note of warning however, the concept of the community carries with it powerful imaginaries of homogeneity which members associated with what indexes membership to the group. And it is often the case that CofPs are represented as communities with well-defined boundaries which in effect contradicts Lave and Wegner's warning of a structuralist application of the framework.

b)   The second issue that has been debated in the literature has to do with issues of politics and power in participation in the life of CofP. This involves who, how, and when members of CofP can challenge or resist norms of interaction or behaviour more generally. Also, conceptualisations of centre/periphery (and who decides movement 'in' and 'out' of the centre) which are at the heart of the framework have been problematized. The notion of 'legitimate participation' has been usefully debated (see e.g., papers in *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 2005: 9/4) and notions of power have been foregrounded. Although the original work (Lave and Wenger, 1991) attempts to capture the complexities of negotiating power in CofPs, the operationalisation of the concept has not always been consistent. A range of studies in management literature (e.g., Contu and Willmott, 2003) have critically reflected on issues of power relations within and around CofP which are often missing from applications of the framework. And the ways in which 'novices' or 'old-timers' claim, project, and resist the CofP norms and relationship with the dynamics of participation in centres of power needs further theorisation.

Without reopening the participation debate here, I agree with Corder and Meyerhoff who suggested that "the term has spread faster than familiarity with the analytic presuppositions and methods that are fundamental to a CofP analysis" (2007: 441). Given the complexity of the relationship between structure and agency, the CofP approach has been a significant development for the study of language use and can be usefully applied for the study of the community members' perceptions of their community. Conceptual clarity is necessary however. The increase in studies taking a 'beyond CofPs' approach indicates (e.g., Amin and Roberts, 2008; Hughes et al., 2007) that the time is ripe for reopening the debate on the affordances of the framework.

As Nicolini (2012) argues "Communities of practice are, in fact, communities of practitioners constantly busy positioning themselves within the ongoing practice" (2012: 94). In the same work Nicolini refers to practice theories as 'a toolkit'. He uses the metaphor of 'zooming in' and 'zooming out' to argue for combining the study of the 'micro' (e.g., ethnomethodology) with attention to the 'macro'. I find this useful and I use the term 'practice' here without including reference to the community. I take an interactional sociolinguistic approach and look into the ways in which participants in workplace events, and particularly business meetings, engage in common practice. By doing so, they negotiate professional roles and

group belonging which is subject to both local and organisational level discourses. I probe this further in Part 3.

Before turning to data itself, the next chapter discusses matters of research methodology when designing and carrying out research in the workplace. It seeks to contextualise and situate my use of terminology and reading of the data that follows.

Notes

1 The concept of 'discourse' is as broad, and open to different interpretations, as 'culture'. Simply put, the term is used to refer to both an instance of spoken or written interaction or macro societal/political and economic structures (and anything in between). Further to this, different traditions frame discourse in particular ways in relation to the historical development of theoretical and methodological constructs. So critical discourse analysts, interaction analysts, or sociolinguists project different meanings on the concept.
2 I use 'talk' broadly to refer to the system of communication and not only verbal interaction
3 The terms 'equality' and 'equity' are not synonymous – although they are at times used interchangeably. Equality typically refers to equality of distribution or equal treatment while equity acknowledges unequal treatment and the lack of equal opportunity.
4 www.mcdonaldsnytristate.com/2014/09/infographic–none–us–good–us/
5 Referring to the various national languages of the EU in the document
6 This dimension is obviously not exclusively related to language, as Malinowski (1923) pointed out long ago. See also Garfinkel, 1972 (Gumperz and Hymes, 1972: 309–324).

PART II

Doing research in intercultural professional settings

"I keep six honest serving-men (They taught me all I knew); Their names are What and Why and When and How and Where and Who."

(Kipling, 1902/1988: 3)

The famous quote from Kipling is often associated with research methodology principles and parameters. This part aims to provide an overview of (some) key issues in relation to designing and carrying out research in the intercultural workplace. It is addressed to those new to the field interested in topics raised in this book as well as others concerned with research pedagogy. Having been asked many times over the years 'why people don't write about these things', I seek to touch upon some of the research practices in our field that are many times left out. I agree with Lewthwaite and Nind (2016) who recently argued research methods pedagogy is under-researched and under-discussed and I seek to contribute to the dialogue. The voice of the text is deliberately different as the writing aims to interact with the reader.

I draw on several completed and ongoing projects as well as supervisions, workshops, and conversations with students and colleagues over the years. My aim is to provide the reader with a brief insight into the lived experience of workplace research. This next chapter of the book aims to complement topics well covered in research methods textbooks but *not* to replace them. It is organised in eleven sections following roughly a commonly reported life cycle of research activity moving from the *planning*, to the *design* and *carrying out* of a project. At the same time, research is never a linear process, despite being illustrated as such. I would encourage the reader to use this part in a zigzag way to follow the needs of their own work or their interests. Chapter 4 contributes

to current debates on research method while Chapter 5 is structured around questions that I am commonly asked. The examples I provide in these chapters are drawn from past projects. They are not exact records but accounts adapted (when necessary for anonymity purposes) and are used to illustrate and clarify the issues I raise.

4

WORKPLACE DISCOURSE

Issues of theory and method

I see my research in line with critical ethnographic research principles and preju‐ dices and this is the perspective from which I write. Although my work is often associated with the qualitative paradigm, I always found those labels either too abstract or too tight and uncomfortable. I am elaborating on my thinking in this section always keeping the workplace as the point of reference.

Professional academics often teach research methodology on the basis of own understanding of the field and research practice. This is entirely appropriate but at the same time not always acknowledged. Instead, it is common to write or talk on what we perceive as the 'generally accepted'. I do not do justice to colleagues who do spend time on the subjective nature of research methods particularly in certain parts of Sociolinguistics and Applied Linguistics (e.g., Rampton, 2003). But the fact that our own worldviews are enacted in the way we use terminology, and are certainly not neutral, needs to be more explicitly acknowledged and discussed in all areas of research methodology training and writing. In this section I am only concerned with issues, methods, and tools directly relevant to my research practice without considering those as the only way for carrying out projects in my areas. My position is that all research is *iterative*, *situated in time and space*, *subjective and personal,* and *never conclusive*. I align with the ethnographic tradition and I am a trained theo‐ retical linguist who turned to sociolinguistics and pragmatics early in her career and someone who is always critical of disciplinary labels. I believe in a critical reading of the world and this has had a major influence on my own research practice. The reader needs to keep this in mind in order to contextualise my writing. In line with Roulston and Shelton (2015), I too agree that "assessments of quality are made in relation to the design and conduct of research" (2015: 340). A reflection on our current practices seems to me to be particularly useful and timely for our field and for future research.

4.1 Researching abstract concepts: culture, identity, and work

Doing research on *identity* or *culture* or the '*intercultural*' as well as *work* involves breaking down and operationalising these concepts. Most of the students I have supervised over the years have experienced some sense of frustration in attempting to frame their work. The reasons are many, one however is recurrent: the many voices in the literature and the difficulty in categorising and drawing lines between concepts that are, as we have seen earlier, abstract. So the research will depend on the meaning the researcher gives on terms and the epistemological position they decide to take. The meanings of abstract concepts are historically, socially, and politically located. Hence there is no one correct way to design or carry out projects involving any of them.

The difficulty in finding clear–cut answers in the 'what is' question which for a long time was (is still) considered the cornerstone of their study, is related to the fact that the question itself can be problematic and narrow. Alasuutari (1995) usefully reflects on the distance between collecting a 'piece of the world' "specimen of the language and culture under study" (1995: 45) and making inferences on the phenomenon itself or the aims of a particular project. Loyalties to theoretical tools and methodologies that are associated with particular epistemological positions fill in the gap between the 'piece of the world' under study and the academic piece that forms an output of academic work as discussed earlier (Chapter 1). This process is heavily political and ideological. And while research methods courses often start with debating 'reality' (cf. early discussion on essentialism, constructionism and postmodernism) they rarely move to questioning 'politics'.

I discuss this further in the next section.

4.2 Research politics-politics of interpretation

The meaning of meaning and the relationship with interpretation of data occupies a central position in linguistic research. In workplace sociolinguistics, there is a vivid debate around interpretation processes and the representation of participants' realities in and through the data. Although it is often perceived as a matter of juxtaposing different theoretical and methodological tools, it also constitutes a negotiation of identity and power im/balance between the 'researcher' and 'the participant'. Clifford already in 1992 argues "there is no politically innocent methodology for intercultural interpretation" (1992: 97). This has to do with the first/second order disconnect (Section 1.3) but also the filtering that academic writing imposes on the representation of research stories.

Commitment to an agenda (whether critical or a positivist or any other) does not only influence the tools the researcher uses but it has implications about the aim of the inquiry and the relationship with the researched. Researchers who advocate for an empowerment–oriented agenda (see e.g., Cameron et al., 1992) criticise research 'on' or 'for' the participant (see also participatory research) for research 'with'. This participatory approach is relevant and useful to the workplace sociolinguist and

maps well on the ethnographically informed nature of work in the field. At the same time however the core issues of positionality and voice of the researcher need to come more to the fore in relation to the affordances and limitations of the current theoretical and methodological toolkit. As it is well established in the critical ethnographic and anthropological tradition, the 'field' is a very political space (e.g., Dimitriadis, 2001). This already challenges the ideals of 'neutrality' of the researcher and the researched – as well as the data collection and interpretation processes.

Power in general and in research contexts is not of one type, and current social science research sees it as situated and locally enacted. The 'researcher' and the 'participant' negotiate positions in the research encounter which are not fixed. A choreography metaphor could be useful in capturing the shifting footings. Although it is still common in social science to refer to participants as a homogenous group (albeit with caveats) and one with which we often construct a clear 'us' and 'them' divide, this position has been challenged time and again (e.g., Cameron et al., 1992; Creese et al., 2009). Acknowledging the multiple roles and identities of 'the researcher' and 'the researched' allows for transitioning boundaries and co-producing research that is relevant to the participants. This however presupposes that politics of what 'good research' looks like and the objectivity 'bias' of the academic genre is addressed. My experience is that the level of openness to multimethod research, critical agendas, participatory research, and so on varies considerably between research centres, departments, journals, and all other pillars of the current academic establishment. These are not just matters of local significance, they have a direct impact on the practice and process of research.

Denzin (2009, Ch. 5) provides a useful insight into the journey of the academic 'story' from conception to the field to publication in relation to the different available epistemologies. He convincingly argues that

> paradigms and perspectives serve several functions for the writer. They are masks that are hidden behind, put on and taken off as writers write their particular storied and self-versions of a feminist, gay-lesbian, Afro-American, Hispanic, Marxist, constructionist, grounded theory, phenomenological, or interactionist text.
>
> *(2009: 90)*

Further to this, the ways in which we make meaning of research processes is always subject to our positioning as researchers. Abstract terms like 'identity' or 'culture' take meaning in the context of the framework the researcher decides to create and subsequently use. These frameworks emerge from the master narratives available to the researcher through our socialisation to the professional world. Establishing and framing a problem or question is not objective or inherent. As Schutz writes in 1953: "[t]he scientific problem, once established, determines alone the structure of relevances" (1953: 31).

Nicely put by S Hall "every regime of representation is a regime of power" (S Hall, 1990: 226), this involves the representation of the researcher in the field, the 'findings' in academic research or the gatekeeping of attributing evaluations of

good or less good academic practice and so forth. Academic storytelling (Denzin, 1994) presents the reader with different interpretations of participants' realities. As in Kafka's metamorphosis, the reader witnesses a process of transition which is nar-rated through appropriate language and style and typically in (quasi-)linear chrono-logical order. The metamorphosis of the researchers themselves through the process of engagement with the enquiry is often left unsaid. There is growing awareness of the limitations of a narrow understanding of the research practice and holistic agendas are put forwards (see Section 4.4.1).

There is still however the ideology of divide which is reflected in its extreme in Schutz's work: "The relationship between the social scientist and the puppet he [sic] has created reflects to a certain extent [. . . .] the relationship between God and his creatures" (1953: 37). Although our thinking has progressed a lot and these divides are not as deep as they used to be, academic practice draws on its own normative understandings of terms and situated practices (see e.g., Taylor and Cameron, 1987). A number of factors affect what we 'see' in the data. Figure 4.1 provides a simplified visualisation of factors influencing the researcher's lenses.

I will touch upon some of these issues in the remaining of the chapter. However the point I am making is that the workplace researcher faces the challenges of car-rying out a project in a complex and changing space, balancing theory/method and adapting and adjusting as the project evolves, as well as interpreting data in a
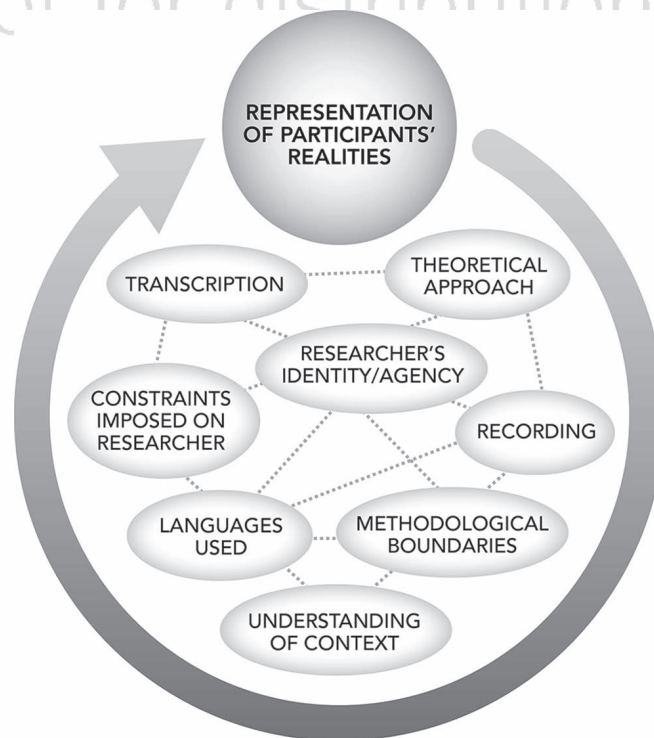
FIGURE 4.1 Factors influencing second order accounts of participant realities

systematic way that captures the participants' lived experience. On the latter, the different discourse analytic traditions handle the nature of inquiry from their different positionings.

4.3 Researching the workplace: critical discourse analysis/ conversation analysis/interactional sociolinguistics

Workplace sociolinguists, in line with the overarching sociolinguistic tradition, prioritise the study of language use in naturally occurring contexts. Interactional data are typically captured through audio/video recordings of (workplace) events and transcribed following a particular system or set of conventions. The emphasis on interaction indexes the field's commitment to go beyond accounts on what participants think or claim they do and shift to the study of ~~actual~~ instances of linguistic practice outside the context of a lab experiment or data elicited by the researcher for the purpose of a study.

The term 'real life data' is used extensively to distinguish from self-reported data and ~~it is~~ an important identity act for the field (cf. sociological and organisation of work scholarship drawing on interviews and questionnaires for instance). In the early days of the field, the focus on interaction was also in line with work adopting a conversation analytic perspective already in place (e.g., Drew and Heritage's Talk at Work, 1992). This provided us with a good body of work on language practices in a range of settings (see e.g., Clyne, 1994; Holmes et al., 1999; Sarangi and Roberts, 1999; Sarangi and Slembrouck, 1996; Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Roberts et al., 1992, and so on).

In this context, most current workplace Sociolinguistic and Applied Linguistic studies draw on recordings of interactional data. In line with the overall discourse turn in Social Sciences (Angouri and Piekkari, 2017 for an overview), workplace discourse analysis grew exponentially over the last few decades and it is still growing to this day. There are different paradigms with associated theoretical trajectories and methodologies that workplace researchers adopt. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Conversation Analysis (CA), and Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS) are by no means the only ones but are the most relevant to what I do and why directly mentioned in this section. Discourse analysis (DA) is commonly used as an umbrella term (Nikander, 2007) in a range of fields and there is no shortage of textbooks and 'how to' guides. Although DA is not a single method, it is often associated with a constructionist epistemological positioning. And the different traditions provide the researcher with the tools to understand and interpret social reality as enacted in talk. DA is becoming increasingly popular with business scholars and the number of studies taking a discourse approach in organisation studies and international business reflects this current trend. The three approaches I discuss here have distinct trajectories and have clear differences in core theoretical issues. Despite this, discourse analysts also share a commitment on language as practice and look for how through language practice "intersubjective understanding, social life and a variety of

institutional practices are accomplished, constructed or resisted" (Nikander, 2008: 415). The remainder of the chapter looks into CDA, then turns to IS and concludes with a closer look at CA theory and tools.

4.3.1 CDA

The CDA tradition (see also earlier discussion in Section 2.8) is mainly concerned with issues of power, inequality as well as inclusion and exclusion (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Scholars taking this stance look into the workplace as a site where power imbalance is enacted or resisted (Wodak, 2000, 2009a). Studies have addressed how power is legitimised in workplace settings, issues of voice and how this is enacted or resisted in various workplace events. And there is a good body of work drawing on the analysis of dominant discourses and ideologies and the ways in which the tacit power equilibrium manifests itself in daily interaction. Particularly studies on meeting talk (see Chapter 7) have also addressed power in decision making and leadership (Wodak et al., 2011; Clarke et al., 2012).

Although the critical agenda has been primarily associated with CDA, it could be argued that all DA traditions have a critical angle. As Johnstone suggests, "DA is a highly systematic and, thorough approach to critical reading (and listening) and critical reading almost inevitably leads to questioning the status quo and often leads to questions about power and inequality" (2008: 29). Given the emphasis on problem driven enquiry in Sociolinguistic and Applied Linguistic research, critical enquiry, and the emphasis on political, is directly relevant to current research agendas. This however is not always agreed or made explicit in the work of scholars interested in the micro-analysis of interaction. Starting with Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS).

4.3.2 IS

IS has and still is particularly influential in workplace sociolinguistics. It provided tools for analysing situated language use and was adopted by researchers studying topics ranging from professional and gender identity to meeting talk and inter-ethnic miscommunication.

I see IS as a theory of context, at the heart of IS is the interconnection between language and the broader environment within which the interactants operate. It is associated with the legacy of John Gumperz (linguistic anthropologist) and draws heavily on the work of Erving Goffman (sociologist). Schiffrin (1994) discusses how Gumperz and Goffman complement each other with the former focusing on the situated interpretation of utterances and the latter on the organisation of society or macro structures which provide the frame of reference for individuals' sense making processes (Schiffrin 1994: 105).

IS draws on a variety of disciplines such as variational sociolinguistics, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, pragmatics, linguistic anthropology, ethnography, and sociology. It is strongly influenced by anthropology and ethnography – it

focuses on the relationship between the situated interaction and broader context. The notion of 'cues' is central to IS (1992: 232). Cues can be anything from phonological markers to structures in interaction. In Gumperz's words:

> They serve to highlight, foreground or make salient certain phonological or lexical strings vis-à-vis other similar units, that is, they function relationally and cannot be assigned context independent, stable, core lexical meanings. Foregrounding processes, moreover, do not rest on any one single cue. Rather, assessments depend on co-occurrence judgments that simultaneously evaluate a variety of different cues. When interpreted with reference to lexical and grammatical knowledge, structural position within a clause and sequential location within a stretch of discourse, foregrounding becomes an input to implicatures, yielding situated interpretations. Situated interpretations are intrinsically context-bound and cannot be analysed apart from the verbal sequences in which they are embedded.
>
> *(1992: 232)*

IS is not the only theory appropriate for the study of language and/in/as context. The methodologies associated with the paradigm however, notably the ethnographically informed analysis of interaction, have provided researchers with the means to connect the here and now of identity work to the broader environment within which the interaction takes place. Gumperz (2008) refers to key stages in IS work involving the:

a)   Insight into the local communicative ecology
b)   Identification of recurrent encounter types
c)   Emic perceptions of the problems/issues and ways of handling them
d)   Detailed analysis of interaction
e)   Playback-playing recordings to those participating in a project

These have been operationalised differently in different studies and in recent years they have allowed for the 'reflexivity project', i.e., researchers to work with professionals in a variety of settings in exploring issues around daily life at work. IS tools allowed the field to go beyond top-down interpretations of identities and to explore stability and change, particularly on issues around identity construction.

Recently, researchers have combined IS tools and methods with either CA, or, more rarely, CDA approaches. IS can offer an *in between* position that allows CA to engage with the political and CDA to provide a more detailed analysis of the situated here and now of talk (see Bucholtz, 2001). Although IS scholars have been criticised for not engaging with the political, in a CDA sense, IS has traditionally been interested in the ways in which inequalities and power imbalance is inferred in interaction. Hence although IS does not *typically* have a political agenda, and

political activism is often seen as an unwelcome bias, it does offer the tools to engage with the wider socio–political issues and the complex relationship between language and power (Rampton, 2010, 2016). I will return to this point in the light of the cases discussed in Part 3.

To conclude, IS has shifted from a strong emphasis on culture as predetermined by the analyst to culture as emergent in interaction. IS, in a Hymesian and Gumperzian sense, pays special attention to the ways in which the interactants negotiate meaning and build shared interpretations of their subjective realities. An act or utterance is read in a particular way by the interactants not on the basis of its linguistic form but on the potential meaning it carries in context. Hence, where and when the utterance occurs, who the people involved are, what the aim of the encounter is – and so on – are critical elements of context that influence how interactants understand utterances. IS is concerned with the analysis of situated interpretation through cues that index discourses the interactants mobilise in context and as such has provided workplace sociolinguists with a rich inventory to study how work is done, largely through talk. IS shares with CA a focus on the detailed analysis of interaction.

4.3.3 CA

CA draws on ethnomethodology and the work of Harvey Sacks and his collaboration with Schegloff and Jefferson in the 60s. CA workplace analysts are interested in the architecture of interaction and the sequential structure of talk. CA is, evidently, not a homogenous group but there is convergence on certain core principles. Important ones to note are (Seedhouse, 2005: 166–167) that conversation is systematically organised and structured, interaction cannot be understood outside the exact sequential environment in which it occurs. No feature or occurrence should be seen as 'random' or meaningless. CA involves the analysis of empirical data drawing on a highly technical transcription system. Key foci of CA work include the analysis of feedback (e.g., what linguistic features indicate regarding agreement, acceptance, reservation) and turn–taking (e.g., are there clues that the turn provides a preferred or dispreferred response: e.g., hesitation, delay, qualification).

CA is often seen as the most rigorous method for the analysis of interaction and it has certainly provided the field with a set of valuable tools for representing and analysing talk. There are though inherent challenges as with any theoretical approach. The most important for our discussion is that CA does not allow the analyst to address issues on the institutional and ideological frame relevant to the encounter within which talk occurs. CA is not drawing on information outside the context of the utterances. According to CA proper, it is not relevant to the CA researcher to decide to address the histories of interactants or the broader context of a speech event unless they are emergent and made relevant locally by the interactants. This is where IS and CA differ.

4.3.4 CA and IS

The relationship between CA and IS has been close from the beginning but also followed parallel routes. Garfinkel's work made an impression on Gumperz and the development of his thinking. And it is indeed the case that drawing fixed barriers between those approaches is a very difficult, and rather subjective, task. At the same time their approach to context is different. CA is focused solely on what seems to be true for the interactants themselves as it emerges and is observable in the data and not the ideological framing of an encounter or the macro norms that are dominant (but often tacit) in institutional contexts. On this IS offers an alternative, or for some complementary, approach that allows the study of the ethnographic context (see Antaki, 2011).

Particularly the concept of culture is not typically discussed within CA and when it is, it is emergent in the data and oriented to as such by conversational participants. Current research and terms such as 'applied CA' (Antaki, 2011) foreground the importance of ethnographic detail for CA studies. A multimethod approach combining CA and IS has the potential to address some of the complexity associated with analysing language practice in situ and taking larger social categories into account at the same time. Issues around categorisation are typically dealt with by Conversation Analysts under the Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) Framework.

4.3.5 MCA

Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) is associated with Sacks's early work (1972/1992) but has also been picked up more recently by a number of scholars (e.g., Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002; Stokoe and Attenborough, 2014). MCA, consistent to its ethnomethodological tradition, focuses on the local context and seeks to unveil how membership is negotiated locally in the situated here and now of interaction (see, e.g., work on gender and MCA, Stokoe, 2012). MCA, in line with the ethnomethodology programme, seeks to explore through a detailed analysis of discourse practices the ways that categories are invoked and sustained in different everyday (mainly) or professional contexts. Or as suggested by Housley and Fitzgerald's (2002: 69) "in-situ and locally occasioned character of members' category work". MCA has been seen as different to CA in that the latter is concerned with the sequential organisation of interaction while the former addresses categories and the way interactants attribute meaning to category displays in their context.

Coming from an IS angle, MCA, to my reading, provides an opportunity for systematically studying categorisation processes, a core issue for all discourse analytic traditions (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002). A closer look at different categories (be it a mother, doctor, squash player, and so on), as enacted in talk, can provide the researcher with the analytical tools to access contextual information that the

interactants make relevant and to investigate the negotiation of the categories in the immediate context of the interaction. It is through the utterances' indexical properties that people create relationships between the categories and position *self* and *other*. MCA can provide space for researchers interested in interaction analysis to come together and probe knowledge that empirical studies have accumulated over the years.

To conclude this discussion, the question of how research can capture what the participants consider relevant has been debated in the sociolinguistic and applied linguistic literature (see e.g., what is often referred to as the Schegloff, Wetherell, Billig debate in *Discourse and Society*, 10 (4), 1999). Despite the debate, the different traditions, Conversation Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Interactional Sociolinguistics, still approach these questions from their distinct perspectives. In my view this is not a limitation, as it greatly contributes to the development of better theoretical and methodological tools for the study of what people do interactionally – so long as there is dialogue and cross-fertilisation between researchers and areas of study. Collectively, this work has foregrounded the significance of the local context and the need to understand workplace identities and cultures not as stable and predetermined but as ongoing processes straddling agency and structure. The more our thinking develops, the more we operationalise the complexity of the subject matter. Having said this, loyalty to methodology and method should not take precedence over loyalty to the research questions or phenomena under study. Alasuutari et al. (2008) make a convincing case for the importance of methodological pluralism which I revisit in the end of the book. The DA paradigms discussed previously are typically associated with the qualitative paradigm in Social Science research methodology. Although I am keen not to write on generic issues and especially on the old and tired, but very persistent, debate on quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies, I feel these terms can often limit and stifle creativity in research (Kara, 2015). They are also problematically used as convenient 'fit all' for describing research activity. I discuss this briefly in the next section.

4.4 QUAN/QUAL/mixed or holistic research?

In my research methods classes, I have been consistently advocating for 'mixed' methodology in line with the current thinking in research methodology research. After endless unproductive comparisons and polemical debates, it is accepted, at least in principle, that both QUAN and QUAL[1] have a story to tell and hence why *mixed* methods has become the common choice at the moment. It is also widely accepted that the research methods and techniques adopted depend upon the questions and the focus of the researcher (see De Vaus, 2002; Seliger and Shohamy, 1989) instead of an 'a priory' superiority of one or the other paradigm. Mixed methods research has been become the 'third' paradigm or third space following from QUN/QUAL first and second paradigms (Ridenour and Newman, 2008; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003, 2009). Having said this however, despite the years of debate (Angouri, 2010), the QUAN/QUAL 'split' still represents for many distinct approaches, roughly associated with 'words' and 'numbers' and distinct worldviews. As Green and Preston

suggested in the editorial of a special issue devoted to mixed methods research, "the image of the introverted statistician . . . or the hang-loose ethnographer are by no means eliminated" (2005: 167). QUAN/QUAL and mixed methods research is very well covered in hundreds of textbooks. I reflect on this elsewhere (Angouri, forthcoming in Litosseliti) however I am keen to probe a little bit the tools and the discourse of our research practice. The fact that mixed methods is 'trendy' does not mean that the binary opposition of QUAN/QUAL is less dominant. And pushing this further, Symonds and Gorard (2010), drawing on earlier work (e.g., Symonds and Gorard, 2008), make an interesting case on how the very concept of 'mixing' reinforces the original divides. In their words 'endorsing mixed methods as a 'third category', "we uphold paradigmatic separatism and thus create a world of limitation" (2010: 15). 'Mixed' is typically associated with either concurrent or sequential 'mixing' of QUAN/QUAL components, which are conceptualised as distinct and different paradigms. Every year my students, diligently, try different designs, most under the mixed methods umbrella which often lead to exciting results. Every year though students also complain about not being able to 'fit' research ~~on work~~place ~~discourse~~ in the QUAN/QUAL/MIX frame and language.

Looking into the QUAN/QUAL, the quantitative paradigm is often equated with statistical tools and probability models while the qualitative one is normatively associated with text data and exploratory and interpretive approaches. The explicit aim of the former is to generalise the findings and provide objective claims free from the researcher's 'bias' while the latter aims for detail and rich data. The quantitative paradigm, associated with positivism and post-positivism has produced dominant hegemonic discourses on what 'good' research looks like and the qualities of research designs. Ideals such as generalisability, objectiveness, distance between the researcher and the research matter and subject, as well as replicability are well known and have been widely discussed (Dörnyei, 2007; Creswell, 2013). They all presuppose an objective reality which the researcher, through a well-crafted and carefully designed tool, can capture at least to a certain extent. Any interferences, not least through the researcher's own worldviews, are to be avoided. This however is a matter of belief rather than an inherent quality of research. The concept of *bias* is a good illustration of our ideals and the emphasis on spotting the 'mistake that can be fixed' which still dominate our research writing. And it is the case that in every class I have taught, avoiding 'bias' is one of the biggest anxieties of students and researchers alike. Discourses of bias are, in my view, a good example of the hegemony of positivism in research thinking. This is not to suggest that researchers should not consider the affordances/limitations of their chosen methodology, nor does it mean that protecting the data from cherry picking is not a valid aim. The concern is that the picture is much more nuanced.

The qualitative paradigm, on the other hand, often takes the form of interview data, observations, or text analysis and is associated with the coding process (manually or through the use of software). Subjectivity is acknowledged and researchers who self-associate with this paradigm often take a constructionist or critical approach to reality. Qualitative research, however, can and often is quite positivist in its design. Consider the times when we aim for a symmetrical design, containing

for instance the same number of big/small companies or participants, or when we work hard to control for different social variable and the emphasis on the 'validity' and 'reliability' of our findings (or *typicality* as per LeCompte and Goetz, 1982) – terms such as 'inter-rater reliability' are good illustrations. Further to this, there is a false belief that anything that is non-numerical can find a convenient home in the qualitative paradigm. This then results to *quantitatively-informed qualitative* studies that fall somewhere between the ideals of the QUAN/QUAL spectrum.

This is not a criticism towards the actual methodologies or tools per se. Instead, I am arguing for a holistic approach to our research practice where QUAN/QUAL/MIX is not a linear binary or ternary but contribute to unpacking different layers of context in a more dynamic design. I consider the *conceptual* affordances of holistic research useful for addressing complex research questions and phenomena.

4.4.1 Holistic research

Any research project is finite and bound in space and time, as well as framed within a whole range of constraints. A common representation of research activity is a linear or sequential order following the typical chronological elements of the research work. This linearity is however artificial. Any research, and particularly in workplace discourse, needs to be interested in or, at least, be able to afford disruption and irregular patterns. In a context where fluidity and complexity is becoming more prominent in social sciences (on complexity, see Urry, 2003 and 9.2) we need tools that will allow representing this more accurately. On this a visual metaphor, drawing on Eudoxus rotating spheres is useful in illustrating how each step of the research process can be represented by nesting concentric spheres each of which are connected to a centre, the researcher's gaze. Eudoxus's spheres turn to opposite directions, which is useful to conceptualise contradictions and conflicts in the process. Obviously, this metaphor can only take us as far as we let it; the main point is the multilayered and shifting nature of the enquiry, one that reveals further angles as it unfolds and is always related to dominant paradigms that influence the thinking of the researcher and the researcher's embodiment of their role.

From this point of view then, although there are, or one can distinguish, distinct stages in the research process, the starting point is that the researcher deals with a shifting and changing phenomenon as well as their own changing understanding, needs and desires. Different theories, frameworks and methodologies are tools for framing and carrying out the study.

Taking a holistic approach is well suited to capture the dynamic nature of activity systems. Holistic research draws on the concept of holism, defined by Oxford (Soanes and Stevenson, 2003: 828) as "the theory that parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection, such that they cannot exist independently of the whole, or cannot be understood without reference to the whole, which is thus regarded as greater than the sum of its parts". Holistic research takes an ecological approach and seeks to understand the different aspect of a research phenomenon or problem
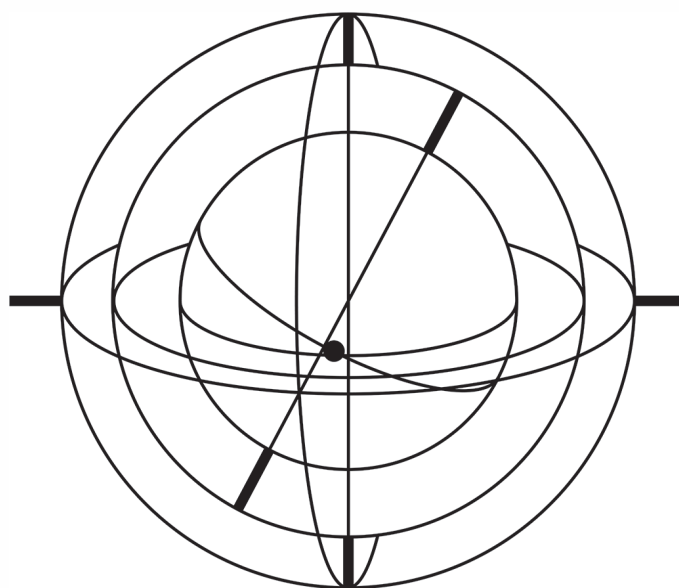
FIGURE 4.2 A representation of Eudoxus's spheres

in relation to one another. This goes beyond one or other paradigm or tool and presupposes an engagement with an issue as a whole rather than the sum of different parts. It also presupposes that the researcher works in partnership with the participants in exploring activities in their context, be it the workplace, a social setting or someone's house. The concept of contextual research (Conley, 2005) is familiar to any sociolinguist who is well versed to theories of context (see also Blommaert, 2001) and is also used in other disciplinary areas (e.g., business) to indicate focus on situated activity. This is particularly relevant to designing and carrying out workplace research and I elaborate further in the following sections.

To sum up, the researcher who attempts to engage with the changing nature of the research situation takes the position of a bricoleur (see Kincheloe et al., 2011) and eclectically, but systematically, makes choices that suit the life cycle of the research enquiry. Bricolage then becomes a conduit for engaging with complexity and fluidity and provides the tools (methods) needed as the situation unfolds. This however is not always straightforward particularly as the drive to challenge our established language and ways of doing is still relatively recent. I go in more detail on the design of workplace discourse research starting from the 'research problem' before moving to the workplace as a research site.

4.5 Framing the research problem

The research problem provides the bedrock of piece of research but not everybody agrees on a particular issue as a problem. Ratifying an issue as a 'problem' is a political act and one that is often initiated by the researcher on behalf of the

participants. It is also ideological, in that it is a problem only if we agree what is not 'fair', 'democratic' or any other values we, as researchers, claim for ourselves and the society around us. These issues are well versed in critical studies, but are often taken for granted.

Turning on the framing of the problem, the wording is important for a problem statement to be succinct and to answer, at least the following three issues: *what the problem is*, *why bother,* and *who cares*. I use these focal points in research classes and tutorials to help my students unpack and place their work. The 'problem' does not need to be a problem for everybody and it won't be a problem for everybody. It is important though for the researcher to explain the rationale on the basis of which they ratify an issue as a problem. In effect, it is the researcher's responsibility to position themselves in relation to the significance of the problem and the impact of the study.

As an illustration, in a recent piece of work with collaborator Litosseliti, we were interested in exploring sexually segregated occupations. The way we frame the problem was as per below:

> This project is premised on the self-evident **economic and societal costs** of heavily sex segregated occupations in the UK as well as the **paradoxical nature** of extreme occupational **segregation** in a labour market that is ostensibly getting more equal and less segregated. After **decades of policy** and study of gender inequality in the labour market, **the situation is not getting any better** despite the implementation of national, industry and organisational policy initiatives.

This brief statement meant to indicate the following: what the problem is, who those affected are, why it is significant and for whom beyond those directly involved. The words I highlighted in bold are for us the core of the issue. Evidently though these are only problematic if we agree on the core values that underpin the stance that we, as researchers, take.

Hence, although it is written in a matter-of-fact way, the way we framed the problem maps on our ideological commitment to equality and inclusion as well as a particular reading of policy interventions over a certain period of time. Research is always situated in time and space and hence a clear positioning is a useful starting point for workplace research projects. The researcher's subjectivities are not biased or 'wrong' but need to be acknowledged as they before part of the heart of the work.

Setting the problem needs to be based on a solid understanding of the workplace as a research site.

4.6 Understanding the context of the problem

We have already seen some of the pertinent characteristics of the modern workplace and the complex, international nature of its activities. Turning to

it as a research site, it is a busy and high stakes political environment where issues of confidentiality and anonymity are central. What does this mean for the researcher? The workplace researcher needs to negotiate their way in and to build a strong and long-lasting relationship of trust. This is evidently a challenge for short projects and researchers may find it uncomfortable as it comes with a need to present and justify a project and need for entry. Over the years students and collaborators used metaphors such as 'selling' a project, 'begging' for data, or 'sneaking' in. These, and similar accounts, index self-awareness and a difficult footing for the researcher. In workplace research the participants are the clear gatekeepers from beginning to end. While in prototypical Social Science research, the researcher designs the tools or the experiment and invites the participants, in the case of the workplace, the research is and remains an outsider, in most cases. This does not only affect whether the project can be carried out but also the quality of the data.

The role of the researcher has been discussed in ethnographic research and issues related to the researcher's insider/outsider status are well known to the reader (see Section 4.8). The Labovian 'Observer's Paradox' (1972) – which refers to the impossibility of observing how language users use language when not observed or studied more generally – as well as the more recent 'Participant's Paradox' (Sarangi, 2002) referring to the observer being observed by the participants and 'Analyst's' paradox, capturing the need to engage with the participants' insight for making sense of the data, all indicate the emphasis on the researcher's role and the research practice for certain areas of the socio and applied linguistic research. In parts of social sciences there is an important debate on the politics of interpretation and issues of power imbalance between the researcher and the researched (also in Linguistics, e.g., Cameron, Rampton as well scholars taking a Critical Feminist approach, e.g., Litoseliti, 2010 are good examples amongst others). These debates often remain insulated but need to become part of the 'mainstream' Social Sciences research methods training and dialogue.

In the workplace, the researcher may be allowed to carry out a project but the layers of context that they will be allowed to see vary considerably. Relevant issues here are how the researcher and the project are seen by the community and the various gatekeepers. Often researchers spend their whole career on the activities of certain sites and develop relationships that allow them to be positioned as a semi-insider. In the case of the novice researcher though, this is difficult. And it is the case that cold calling rarely produces good results in either securing access or quality data.

As well put by Sarangi (2001: 19):

> How the researcher is perceived by the subjects is as crucial as how the researcher manages his/her presentation of self. We can think here of multiple possibilities, e.g., researcher as insider, as outsider, as agent of change [. . .] these different identities index different levels of participation and involvement (including trust and accountability) with research subjects.

Personal and social networks are often forgotten in the design of projects as we often make mistakes in who we know and who can introduce us to members of our community of interest. See for instance Hoffman's account which echoes many researchers field experience.

> Introducing myself as a sociology graduate student, I had very limited success in getting by the gatekeepers of the executive world. Telephone follow-ups to letters sent requesting an interview repeatedly found Mr X 'tied up' or 'in conference'. When I did manage to get my foot in the door, interviews rarely exceeded half an hour, were continually interrupted by telephone calls (for 'important conferences', secretaries are usually asked to take calls) and elicited only 'front work' (Goffman, 1959), the public version of what hospital boards were all about.
>
> By chance during one interview, my respondent discovered that he knew a member of my family. "why didn't you say so?" The rest of the interview was dramatically different than all my previous data. I was presented with a very different picture of the nature of board work.
>
> *(Hoffman, 1980: 46)*

Although Hoffman's issue here is on the student status, the same applies to any researcher. Being an outsider in a well-guarded context means very limited access to the communities' tacit knowledge. Securing access is the first step in the process of building a relationship. Being introduced certainly helps in opening the door, it is though not the end of the road. The researcher is introduced to a community with its own practices, politics, and power im/balance. Understanding the 'who is who' can be a complex process. Equally important is what the researcher wants to find out; it is often the case that members of the community are not aware of their practices or their intentions.

This puts the researcher in a privileged position to specify an agenda and impose a reality on the research participants. The concepts of first and second order are again very useful here. Schutz makes a distinction between the individual subjectivity of the experience (first order) and the researcher's attempt to explain social phenomena (second order). Constructing the second order involves, according to Schutz, a process by which the researcher selects what is considered relevant and typical to the researched. The indirect process of constructing theory is based on interpretation and lies with the researcher. At the same time the lay participant should be able to recognise the individual experience in the constructed model. Schutz work influenced the development of ethnomethodology and the emphasis on what the participants make relevant to interaction. It has also attracted criticism in sociological literature of its time (e.g., Giddens, 1976). Schutz's work however is particularly useful for engaging with the different agendas and motives that are relevant to the researcher and the researched – and accordingly the different contexts of meaning any individual experience can afford. The workplace researcher in particular needs to draw on a range of methods in order to unpack different layers of meaning.

The relationship between the researcher and the participants is a core issue in any research tradition and particularly pronounced in ethnographic studies as I discuss later. For the workplace researcher a close relationship with the research participant is a necessity for accessing and understanding the context. A participatory design however goes even further and sees the participants as co-investigators. This can increase the impact of the study and the implementation of the findings and overall contribution for those involved in a project. In my experience, it also contributes to a long-lasting relationship and to a better quality and an overall meaningful and rewarding experience.

4.7 Participatory research and appreciative enquiry (AI)[2]

The participatory approach is based on the action research principles of moving from an Us and Them (researcher/participants) binary to a collaborative model or "the research process with those people whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study" (Bergold and Thomas, 2012: 1). Participatory Research (PR) shifts the power of deciding the questions, procedure, sample, and so on from the researcher to the researcher and the participants together in a collaborative endeavour – in line with the principle of "research [. . .] with" our participants" (Cameron et al., 1992: 22). In the participatory model, the participants collect and take part in the analysis of the information and share the responsibility of acting upon the findings, disseminating and implementing relevant actions. The boundaries between PR and Action Research are anything but clear cut (see e.g., Reason and Bradbury, 2008) and the term 'Participatory Action Research' (PAR) is also commonly used for research sharing the same principles and priorities, namely shared control, empowering marginalised groups and making the tacit explicit, democratic design, and an interest in the 'ordinary' (Chambers, 2008). PR takes a bottom-up approach and shares with action research an interest in everyday practice and change for the benefit of the lay people. It is not one set of methods or tools and can be QUAN/QUAL or, more frequently, multimethod. It is normatively associated with qualitative designs, but this indexes the standing and preferences of individual researchers rather than the tradition itself. PR/PAR sees knowledge as situated and is addressing the power im/balance from the perspective of the marginalised or voiceless groups. As such it is political and goes well with critical approaches and discourse analytic traditions which aim at revealing the complexity of people's realities (Chambers, 1997). At the same time however PR/PAR has collaboration at its core which is not the case for all action research (on action research see Noffke and Somekh, 2009) and action research focuses on 'action' and change in the world which is not always the case for PR (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995).

For the workplace analyst one of the key issues of this approach is that it suggests a 'hands-off' approach to actual data collection (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003; Stubbe, 2001; Angouri, 2010). In other words, the participants themselves decide which events, how much and how best to capture and record. This can be an uncomfortable position as the researcher often hits the field with strong ideals of a sample that is 'systematic' – often this means symmetric in ways defined *by the researcher*, e.g.,

X number of events by Y number of people over Z number days. And there are, of course, good reasons to have a rationale and well thought through plan. However there are at least three possible problems associated with this type of designs apart from their leaning towards a positivist way of thinking: a) the workplace socio-linguist does not know the way a particular setting (workplace or even industry) works, b) the researcher by her/himself cannot frame or explore enough angles of the problem. So a bottom-up design, which may look less tidy, may in fact provide a more systematic way into the phenomenon under study, and c) the researcher is equipped with skills, knowledge, and preferences over specific tools and methods, which provides a particular lens for seeing and understanding other people's realities, but this may not be the most relevant toolkit for the project. Already in the 50s, Trow writes on foregrounding or preferring one method based on "an inherent superiority over others by virtue of its special qualities and divorced from the nature of the problem studied, that I take a sharp issue" (1957/70: 143). By working with the participants and taking a commitment to co-constructing knowledge the researcher may be required to get out of their comfort zone and combine methods that were not previously in the plan. This of course comes with its own challenges as the (super) researcher, qualified in all methods and ways of analysis, evidently, is a mythical creature. With the move towards mutlidisciplinarity, however, this work becomes more realistic and feasible when shared between teams of researchers and non-academic professionals.

PR does not mean that the researcher cannot decide to focus on specific aspects of a problem or a topic on the basis of past research, literature, or interest. PR however can increase the sustainability of a project's findings and as such it is always beneficial to allow for participants' involvement as much as possible. Practically for the workplace discourse analyst interested in analysing interaction, a PR approach may mean that interested volunteers from the target population record interactions from their everyday lives. It could also involve them indicating which event/s are more suitable and provide opportunities for observing or recording spaces (e.g., social events) that can be significant but often difficult to access. PR also can give voice to groups that otherwise would remain invisible.

4.8 Ethnographic designs – participatory research in the workplace

There are many step-by-step guides for 'doing' ethnography apart from references in general social sciences research methods textbooks (e.g., Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Gobo, 2008; Blommaert and Dong, 2010 amongst others). Reading a dedicated book is an excellent start (and necessary for the workplace discourse researcher). I will raise here the issues I catch myself addressing when reviewing, supervising, or teaching.

Ethnography as a term has been, and is still, often misused or abused. The term is used light-heartedly for more or less any kind of project involving fieldwork or

observation. Ethnography is *not* a single method. A number of methods can and are used by the researcher (e.g., direct observation, interviews, and questionnaires too!). What distinguishes ethnographic research is its tradition, purpose, and worldview. Also ethnography does not *equate* qualitative research and interviews.

Out of the hundreds of definitions on ethnography many are useful in addressing core ontological and epistemological issues. Let us see two: Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 1) argue that:

> in its most characteristic form [an ethnographic design] involves the ethnographer participating, in people's lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions − in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.

And a bit more recently, Johnson (2000: 111) writes on ethnography as "a descriptive account of social life and culture in a particular social system based on detailed observations of what people actually do". Ethnography is a mixed church and evidently different people foreground different aspects and traditions. The work of Blommaert (2013, 2015), and Blommaert and Dong (2010), provides a very useful insight into the challenges and dilemmas the researcher faces in the field *as well as* before and after. Ethnography is best understood as a perspective (Dong, 2017) rather than a narrow set of methods or principles. Going back to Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) prototypical definition, the ethnographer is interested in developing a *holistic* understanding of norms and practices that members of a community take for granted (and more often than not, they are not aware of) when performing mundane tasks or behaving in what is considered appropriate in a given context. Developing this knowledge is the heart of the ethnography and as well put by Blommaert 'the process is the product' (Blommaert and Dong, 2010). The researcher's journey in understanding the different layers of meaning is not a condition for getting to some abstract 'end point', it is the research itself.

Reflexivity is directly related to the ethnographic perspective and the process of constant interpretation, positioning and realisation of the researcher's influence on the process. Merton (1948) discusses the subjective process of meaning attribution which mobilises behaviours the individual considers relevant or appropriate to particular situation or context. The so-called Thomas Theorem − "If men [sic] define situations as real they are real in their consequences" − is very useful in the nature of the ethnographic work. What the researchers 'see' and how they re/act as well as what the participants see is a dynamic and continuously changing equilibrium. Reflexivity is widely used in social sciences to refer to (or interchangeably with) critical reflection. The focus is typically on the role of the researcher or the influence of the dominant research traditions and paradigms in framing the object of inquiry. Reflexivity is associated with the constructionist paradigm and the fluidity

and changing nature of identity and self (which applies to the researcher and the participants). In a recent work Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009: 9) argue that

> in reflective empirical research the centre of gravity is shifted from the handling of empirical material towards, as far as possible, a consideration of the perceptual, cognitive, theoretical, linguistic, (inter)textual, political and cultural circumstances that form the backdrop to – as well as impregnate – the interpretations

For the workplace discourse analyst, the interest is in the ways people make language choices in negotiating, constructing, and resisting ideologies and dominant discourses in carrying out their normal (according to them) lives at work. In order to achieve this holistic approach, the researcher typically needs to spend time in the field, which is why ethnography is associated with fieldwork. It is also seen, in its prototypical form, as a longitudinal process where the researcher is transitioning from the position of the outsider to that of the insider. In this process of transition, the ethnography reader will come across the term 'liminality', used to signify an 'in between' stage between the researcher's original-outsider's view and the transitioning in a community's norms and processes. The term is associated with the work of van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1964) who continued the discussion on a spatiotemporal threshold between two worlds. The three phases or stages identified in the process as separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation (Turner, 1969/2008: 94). Turner, building on van Gennep argues that "during the intervening 'liminal' period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') are ambiguous; he [sic] passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past of coming state" Turner, 1969/2008: 94). And in the same work Turner argues " [t]he neophyte in liminality must be a tabula rasa, a blank slate on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in the respects that pertain to the new status" (Turner, 1969/2008: 103). Although this work is rooted in anthropology and the type of fieldwork which is associated with the rituals or behaviours of people, exoticized as being in isolated parts of the world, the transition to the insider's status has a lot of currency in ethnography and is directly associated with the holy grail of achieving the 'insider's' perspective.

The transition from an outsider to an insider position, typically referred to as etic to emic, is not one single process involving movement from X to Y. For the workplace researcher, knowledge of the field, the key agents, dominant ideologies, and discourses are not readily observable and change. Sarangi nicely argues that the complexity of the setting "leaves the discourse researcher with no choice but to engage with context at all levels" (Sarangi, 2002: 100). Let us also consider what being the insider into a hospital, corporate company, school, or university would actually mean and what skills the analysts need to interpret practices and norms. The editorials by Sarangi and Candlin (2003, 2011) and the work by Holmes and Stubbe (2003) are highly recommended reading for anybody in or coming to the

field. This work, amongst others, addresses the importance of aligning the position of the analyst with that of the participant and advocate for collaborative research instead of the researcher attempting to be able to fully interpret 'what is going on'. The transitioning phase is an ongoing process whereby the researcher engages and understands the activities of a research site up to a point. The workplace discourse analyst is not and should not ~~to~~ become the expert on the site's knowledge.

This then would mean that the insider's perspective is an ideal rather than an actual achievable status. The insider's knowledge would presuppose that all 'insiders' have access to the same systems of knowledge, abide to same norms and practices and so on. This is evidently not the case. The applied linguist or sociolinguist is and remains (and should remain) an expert in language (use). They can contribute by creating spaces for the non-linguists to *reflect on or back*. Roberts (2003) discusses this in relation to the relevance of applied (broadly understood) research for professional practice.

To sum up, the researcher's understanding of the context is partial but the insider's reality is also not equally shared by all insiders, different representations of the social world coexist and it is the unpacking of this complexity that makes the journey also the destination (Brewer, 2000). This highlights further the important of participatory research.

4.8.1 Engaging with emic and etic

Let us now turn to the core and widely cited emit/etic notions. Prototypically an etic approach refers to observable behaviour from the position of an outsider to a system or community. An emic approach on the other hand refers to behaviours seen within the system and through the eyes of the members of a group or community. The concepts of emic and etic are central in the paradigm and have spread in research methodology to indicate a priority on the participants' views instead of that of the researcher's.

The terms derive from Anthropology and Pike's work (1967). They are typically used as a binary with the insider-outsider as the ends of the continuum. They are also carry strong connotations of quality of an ethnographic project with the 'emic' being superior to the 'etic'. This represents one of the strong ideals in ethnography as discussed previously. In relation to the workplace, and I assume any other research site too, the two are not mutually exclusive. Terms such as 'semi-insider' (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010) indicate that positioning is more complex than a simple either/or. It can also index an ongoing process which may last for the whole of a scholar's career.

At the same time, being able to step back and bring the outsider's view can be important for synthesising and theorising as well as contributing to a particular's site activities. This second order view of the world (cf. Section 1.3) is always an etic order.

In the study of culture mainly in international management the two positions are also juxtaposed in relation to culture as a 'system' vs. culture as a cross-national

TABLE 4.1 Assumptions of emic and etic perspectives and associated methods from Morris et al., 1999: 783

Features	Emic/Inside View	Etic/Outside View
Defining assumptions and goals	Behaviour described as seen from the perspective of cultural insiders, in constructs drawn from their self-understandings	Behaviour described from a vantage external to the culture, in constructs that apply equally well to other cultures
	Describe the cultural system as a working whole	Describe the ways in which cultural variables fit into general causal models of a particular behaviour
Typical features of methods associated with this view	Observations recorded in a rich qualitative form that avoids imposition of the researchers' constructs	Focus on external, measurable features that can be assessed by parallel procedures at different cultural sites
	Long-standing, wide-ranging observation of one setting of a few settings	Brief, narrow observation of more than one setting, often a large number of settings
Examples of typical study types	Ethnographic fieldwork; participant observation along with interviews	Multisetting survey; cross-sectional comparison of responses to instruments measuring justice perceptions and related variables
	Content analysis of texts providing a window into indigenous thinking about justice	Comparative experiment treating culture as a quasi-experimental manipulation to assess whether the impact of particular factors varies across culture

variation (Sorge et al., 2015). Morris et al. (1999) already in 1999 offered a summary table of emic/t as used for the study of culture and cognition.

The aim of ethnographic research is not prototypically to compare and contrast between sites. Given the situated nature of the enquiry, the workplace researcher needs to be careful not to fall in the generalisation trap or to be quick to look for differences or similarities. The first stage of getting into a professional setting is to develop a (necessarily rough) map of its activities. This 'map' will become more complex and exciting as time goes by and as the researcher matures. Each site and enquiry is unique and hence the main aim of the researcher is to start seeing the multiple angles that are available (see also observations made later). The nature of the enquiry does not mean that patterns are not found.

EXAMPLE: In ongoing work with Meredith Marra and the New Zealand language in the workplace project, we are interested in analysing data from meetings in a range of workplace settings. The meeting event is privileged here because it is visible to the participants and research has shown it to be a main site for the construction

of organisational knowledge (Angouri and Mondada, 2017). In this work our aim is to unpack how interactants negotiate professional identities in this core event which occupies a substantial percentage of their time. When we started this work we were expecting a whole range of issues due to the various different industries, sites, languages in our datasets. We came across striking similarities however. We discuss our findings in our (Angouri and Marra, 2011) paper entitled 'meeting as genre' where we make a case for structures that cut across the settings we studied.

Making patterns visible is theoretically useful and practically relevant for the participants for either training and consultancy or awareness training. Bringing together the analyst's views with that of the participants can provide comprehensive descriptions and increase the value of the data for the site. And in our case we worked with some of these organisations in helping them improve what they identified as not optimal in terms of decision making, problem solving, or support and development of junior staff.

The possibilities for collaboration are endless and hence why workplace researchers often continue working on a particular set of problems for long period of times. The more we start appreciating the various layers of the 'problem' or the setting the more exciting it is to keep discovering.

4.9 Interpreting workplace data and the value of the participants' views

The closer the researchers get to the workplace and the more time they spend in building relationships, the more they are invited to see the complexity of practices, norms, and ideologies. Hence the original 'problem' starts breaking into nested spheres or problems. A workplace researcher often gets access through a particular route (be it a person or team). Depending on how successful the researcher is in 'unlocking' more spaces, layers of context become available. This is a never-ending process and different theoretical traditions engage with contextual information in different ways (e.g., see earlier discussion on different DA traditions). Having access to the insider's knowledge is relevant to any approach to the analysis of workplace discourse data (cf. Sarangi, 2011) as otherwise basic activities and motivations remain opaque.

Figure 4.3 represents the interconnections between the different stages of the research, each of which can be seen as a mini research project in each own right: dynamic, situated, and living (i.e., changing over time). The case here is on foregrounding the *evolving* nature of workplace research.

What Figure 4.3 aims to show is that linearity is part of the process of carrying out research but at the same time a complex and dynamic representation is more suitable for capturing research practice. This becomes particularly evident when the researcher spends time in carrying out detailed fieldwork and observing emergent aspects of the participants' realities.
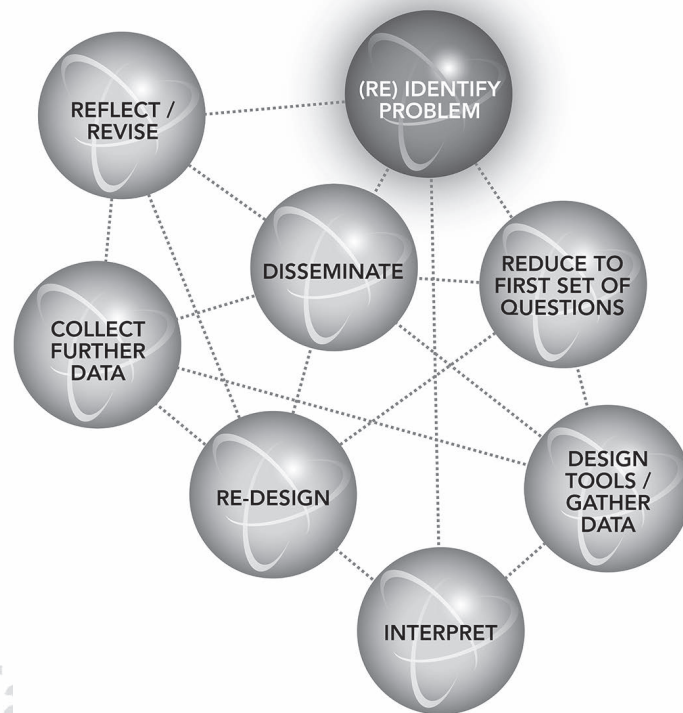
FIGURE 4.3 Modelling research activity

4.10 Repositioning fieldwork

The fieldwork, for many, is associated with the researcher's first 'data collection' visit to the field. This, however, is in my view a stage already well in the fieldwork process. Visiting the field is part of a (often difficult and long) period of negoti‑ating with core stakeholders. At that stage the researcher has either initiated the contact or has been approached but has little 'real feel' of the issues involved. Being approached is, evidently, a much easier position and one that gives more room for negotiation and manoeuvre.

On the notion of stages: the workplace discourse researcher needs to have cov‑ered relevant literature and to have benefited from the experience of past research before initiating contact. I often hear and read that the ethnographer is supposed to read after the initial fieldwork. This, in my view, may cost the researcher dearly in time and data. It also assumes the researcher is a tabula rasa which can never be the case – even if our researcher does not read until later in the research process, they have already read a lot through their professional socialisation to the field, academic courses, research methods grand narratives and so on.

The fieldwork planning involves, at first, the identification of possible setting/s and relevant parameters for the fieldwork. In the negotiation process and ethics clearance the workplace researcher will need to be specific on their access needs and methods they plan to use. If the aim is to collect recordings this needs to be

thoroughly negotiated and justified. Hence the researcher is often in the difficult position to have to anticipate the needs of a project that will evolve in time and space. The unrealistic of the tabula rasa researcher is evident.

Following this, the researcher needs some preparatory visits to the field simply to orient themselves and to help them get a grasp of the logistics of the work. I always advise at this stage to consider if the project is still doable or more/different permissions are necessary. It is only at that stage that the researcher can move to the field for the first 'real feel' observations. This paves the way for other methods of collecting information. This stage is an ongoing process and the researcher needs to be systematic and careful to not get pulled to all possible directions. During the fieldwork the researcher continuously negotiates their presence and positioning with the participants; how the research and the researcher is seen depends on an infinite number of factors such as how much the project is seen as a priority concern, by whom and for what purpose. Ethnographic research is often (perceived as) longitudinal. I consider longitudinal any project that involves more than roughly a month's worth of data from the field, although obviously this depends on topic and quality. There is no figure however that determines how 'much' is enough of fieldwork (see also O'Reilly, 2009) but the key issue is that fieldwork cannot and should not be reduced to a single visit. Equally, the workplace researcher does not need to become a permanent fixture of the setting. Coming and going, in negotiation with key participants, actually allows for seeing more at different times of the day and with the same or different people interacting in a wider range of workplace events. This is directly relevant to the ideal of *unobtrusiveness*.

The collection of 'real life' or 'naturally occurring' data has been an important conduit into the 'emic' in social sciences. In order to get an image of reality which is not tampered with, Social Science research in general and ethnography in particular has favoured unobtrusive research (this should not be read as covert or not ethically sound). In order to address limitations associated with self-reported data, the ethnographer aims to capture more than what a single snapshot provides.

Webb et al. (1965/2000: 173) already notes that:

> Questionnaires and interviews are probably the most flexible and generally useful devices we have for gathering information. Our criticism is not against them, but against the tradition which allowed them to become the methodological sanctuary to which the myopia of operational definitionalism permitted a retreat.

The field of workplace discourse has fully engaged with this criticism and since its early days, self-reported information was mainly seen as secondary or supplementary to the primary data (i.e., interaction). And in workplace discourse, leading researchers (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003; Holmes et al., 2011 and later work) have taken a PR approach and the data is collected by the participants themselves.

Overall, there is relatively little writing on unobtrusiveness despite its significance for research. In a more recent work Lee (2000) shows how the Social Sciences still negotiates its identity at the crossroads of dominant concepts such

as 'measurement' and 'triangulation', which derive and are associated with the positivist and post-positivist paradigm, and the more recent social constructionist turn. I am returning to some of these issues at the very end in relation to future research for workplace discourse. What is important to note here is that the researcher's influence on the process is a) not absent when participants record interaction, and b) not a limitation of the study according to the viewpoint discussed here. Ethnography does not and cannot take place in a vacuum, the researcher/s is as much part of the process as the participants. Although I align with the ideal of unobtrusiveness in terms of respecting people's time and the imposition of the study, the fly on the wall is both unachievable and probably undesirable given the analyst paradox already discussed.

4.11 Multidisciplinarity in workplace discourse research

The workplace is the research site for a number of disciplines and the nature of the problems the workplace researcher seeks to address typically requires the collaboration of different scholars. This is further supported by the encouragement of funding bodies and research councils which have set multidisciplinary enquiry as a priority. Traditionally, Linguistics has been spread across a number of disciplinary areas and departments: Psychology, Education, Health, and Computer Sciences as well as in the mainstream Linguistics and Modern Languages fields, where it has links with the arts and creative industries. More recently, greater emphasis has been placed on the importance of multidisciplinarity and sociolinguistics, and Applied Linguistics is still in the process of adapting to this step-change in thinking and to embrace the possibilities afforded by multidisciplinary approaches.

The blurring of disciplinary boundaries is also in line with the turn to constructionism and postmodernist paradigms. At the same time, the way knowledge is organised, reproduced, and disseminated in academia is clearly on the basis of specific disciplines. Equating multidisplinarity with a moral order of 'good' or 'positive' is ideological and often misleading. An alternative model may be desirable and appealing, but it is certainly not the lived reality of our world. Drawing an analogy with the shift in thinking from positivism to constructionism and postmodernism, the repositioning of academic practice takes time. What multidisciplinarity means and how it is handled, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with theoretical and methodological transitions, are not typically discussed in enough detail despite the emphasis by funding bodies and research organisations. There has been a vivid debate on terminology, e.g., inter- vs. multi-disciplinarity and anti- or post- are all used in relevant discourses. And although matters of definition are important, we have long way to go to move from our discipline specific ways of doing. Multidisiciplinarity, however, is often a need for the workplace discourse analyst.

EXAMPLE: In a current project we are exploring what makes some teams more effective than others in ad hoc medical emergencies. The study of this

project depends on a definition of what 'effective' means and by whose criteria; that of the medical professionals, the patients or their families. Our decision was guided from factors such as a) previous work and literature in the field, b) the frequency of the emergency and the pragmatic concerns in capturing 'enough' materials for analysis, and c) the gap in existing knowledge. We decided to use medical criteria to rank teams in terms of performance and the analysis then focused on top and bottom performing teams. The linguistic analysis was blind to the results of the medical analysis and the other way around. The results showed interesting relationships between linguistic behaviours and overall performance (Siassakos et al., 2011). As a sociolinguist I needed the input of my medical colleagues in order to understand practice and team performance in the emergency context. And equally my medical colleagues needed my perspective in order to see 'communication' differently. The end result was ~~what~~ we think a much richer project.

The process was not easy however; getting out of one's comfort zone requires time. In the case of the previous example, the collaboration started in 2009 and it took about two years to develop some mutual understanding and language. It also involved questioning, explaining, and recontextualising one's own assumptions and positions considered 'given' in a field. This is rewarding but can also be time consuming and frustrating. It can also be misleading if the bigger picture is lost. This is very well captured in the 'elephant story', a visualisation of which is provided in Figure 4.4.
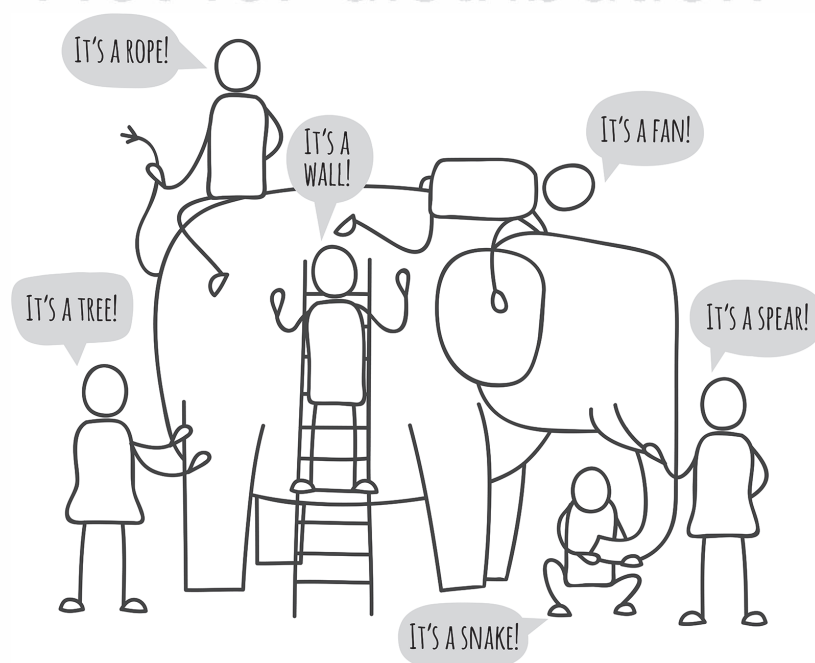

FIGURE 4.4 The pitfalls of multidisciplinary research – the blind people and the elephant story

It is all too common for the workplace researcher to encounter difficulties which have to do with the set-up of academic institutions, research centres, as well as the relevant procedures for assessing the quality of research, disseminating findings or applying for funding and/or scholarships. All this activity is discipline bound, and crossing boundaries makes it challenging. It is especially challenging for curricula that are grounded within disciplines and therefore 'have' to socialise the future generations to discourses and practical tools that are part of our professional make up. It is also challenging for researchers whose work needs to be published in order to be read (and assessed).

The politics of academic research is not the interest of this book, but it is directly relevant to the workplace discourse analyst who can often be pulled towards two conflicting directions: one towards multidisciplinary research (and what fits the nature of the enquiry) and one towards clear disciplinary boundaries for publication and other professional purposes. Disciplines have distinct theoretical trajectories, worldviews, and tools they favour and through a process of socialisation in the discipline and training through academic programmes the researcher becomes a 'member' of the community and has access to its resources. Belonging then is constructed in and through the discourse of the discipline exactly in the same way as the professionals I discuss in the case studies of Part 3 of this book.

Obviously, no discipline or even academic department is 'one whole' but the process of becoming an established member of the community or moving from the periphery to the core of a community involves talking the talk and walking the walk. This creates tensions and has consequences for individuals whose inquiry cuts across different disciplinary boundaries. It also indexes however a changing academia and academic profession; one that is moving from a clear Us and Them to a more open one, aligned with the nature of our enquiry.

For the early career readers of this book, it is all too usual to have been asked to 'position' self in relation to the 'field' and to target 'top' journals. These labels I have highlighted indicate dominant ideologies which underpin our professional practice. Academia is changing and re-organises its activity around multidisciplinarity – the number of centres, institutes, or platforms where researchers from across one institution come together is steadily increasing. And disciplinary fields themselves have become diverse. Think of labels such Humanities and Social Sciences, the broad super-fields within which Linguistics is typically positioned, the composition and boundaries between them is porous to say the least.

In business discourse in particular, the call for a 'partnership research' (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson, 2001) is not new and has been discussed in relation to participatory study. Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson however also call for a "shared agenda between researchers working within associate disciplines" (2002: 276). Fourteen years later, we are closer to this vision with more teams and projects and a variety of analytical approaches complementing each other under the same research programme. Multidisciplinary research on workplace discourse has benefited from the discourse turn in business studies and although the number

of collaborative research is small (see Angouri and Piekkari, 2017 for a critique), studies have paved the way for cross-fertilisation of ideas, findings and sharing the affordances and limitations of the methodological apparatus.

We are however far from this becoming the norm. And similarly multidisciplinarity is not and *should not* be the panacea of all research problems and questions. What multi or interdisciplinary education and training would look like and the associated challenges for pedagogic innovation should preoccupy further research in social sciences (see e.g., Frodeman, 2013; see also Section 9.2). But what multidisciplinary enquiry *should not* look like is a 'Jack of all trades' where the discourse analyst attempts to simultaneously become a miniature of the other members on the team. Engaging with multidisciplinary research is becoming and will, eventually, become more standard for the workplace analyst. It does however take years and commitment to find the interfaces between the traditions and paradigms within which researchers operate. I return to this in the conclusions of the book.

Notes

1 It goes without saying that the QUAN/QUAL schools are (very) broad ~~churches~~ and not all researchers have identical beliefs and objectives. The key principles however associated with powerful ideals in the two camps are shared within research communities. The discussion here is intentionally short and only raises that issues that are most relevant for the following sections. The reader is referred to relevant literature for detailed and introductory accounts.
2 I am using AI as it is a common abbreviation.

5

TRICKS OF THE TRADE – Q&As ON DOING RESEARCH IN THE WORKPLACE

In what follows I turn to some 'typical' issues I have been asked over the years. Before that however a note of caution:

5.1 The importance of being pragmatic

Professional settings constitute obvious and natural research sites for the study of workplace discourse. Workplace research presents the researcher with a conflict between what is theoretically *desirable* and what is empirically *possible* in relation to *access*. Most research methods books and chapters, as well as the advice we normally give our students, is to start with, at least some, idea of research objectives. The spread of ethnographic research however meant that the research community, not always but more often, became open, tolerant, and interested in bottom–up, emergent designs.

Yet, this has not changed the dominance of ideals stemming from a positivist approach to research, according to which decisions are made by the researcher before the collection of the data in the form of hypotheses or research questions. And it is the case that we still expect a fairly concrete design at the beginning of a project and an idea of the direction of travel. This is more an ideal, a construct, that represents an inherently changing and changeable process in a linear, neat, and tidy way. The workplace researcher needs to be ready to *adapt, adjust*, and to not miss opportunities for getting insights. This does not mean 'anything goes', to the contrary, being systematic and challenging own assumptions about the phenomena one is interested in is essential. The researcher's loyalties however should be not on a tight, and typically top–down, design but on the quality of the research and establishing a collaboration with the 'researched'.

Earlier in my career I was interested in working with family businesses in order to understand issues of professional, personal, and collective identity. Unfortunately, I had little contacts in relevant networks and my attempts for establishing

connections failed – also a number of organisations made it very clear I was very low on the priority list. At the same time, my strong network in multinational large companies were showing vivid interest and were providing me with opportunities for research on the actual phenomena I wanted to explore. After a lot of consideration, I followed the pragmatic route which was the only feasible option at the time. I spent a lot of time considering whether a change of plans is a possible problem and whether the research was being significantly compromised by issues out of my own control. This however was a reflection of my own ideals, rather than a 'problem' with the research.

Let us now turn to some common issues for the workplace discourse analyst:

5.2 'How do I get in?' – Issues of access and design

The difficulty in securing access into professional settings is a truism. The researcher is an outsider and, understandably, not trusted. Most studies I have seen over the years start with either the ideal of a randomised design or with a commitment to a comparative study involving the researcher selecting companies on a set of predefined critieria. And although it is possible that the researcher has a good network and that the target sample shows interest in the work, very little comes out of the negotiation process. Typically, after some months of efforts, the researcher comes to the conclusion that it is practically impossible to spend the time that is needed for the procedure to bear fruit and that the originally conceived design is unrealistic. This process is difficult to handle as a 'convenience' sample is often seen as a compromise. This however is not the case. An emphasis on random sampling as the golden standard and a design that does not factor in what is possible is not an indication of good research. Rather it is an indication of a quantitatively conceived, qualitative design. There is a lot written in ethnographic research on accessing the field (Gobo and Molle, 2017), in workplace discourse the implications of access issues are not often discussed. Irrespective of the specifics of the design, a participatory approach often enhances chances of success and allows for a realistic framing of the project.

5.3 'What is my research problem and how do I come up with research questions?' – Problem-based enquiry unpacked

The concept of the problem is very widely used in relation to research. It is seen as the starting point of an enquiry, leading to research questions and for applied and sociolinguists, reference to 'real world' problems have been a significant identity act, distinguishing theoretical research to research that has specific applications and addresses 'real' world concerns. Although I take issue with the 'real world' label as, in my view, academia is as 'real' as other professional settings, what is relevant here is that with our discipline in general, and workplace research in particular, the 'problem' often indexes the starting point of an inquiry. The research problem underpins the research design and carrying out of the work. In that sense I agree

with Kerlinger and Lee (2000) on the significance of the problem for the whole study. At the same time however what counts as a 'problem' and for whom is not straightforward.

As with any concept, the term carries the potential for different meanings depending on the context within which it is used. We all face, handle, and solve 'problems' in social, personal, and professional spheres of our lives. What the problem 'is' though is less straightforward. Relevant literature (Sternberg and Frensch, 2014) has shown the importance of identifying a problem for the problem solving process that follows. And we also know from research that defining 'the problem' is a problem solving process in its own right. Although the *research problem* is evidently different in nature, the identification of the problem is, equally, the outcome of a reflexive and negotiated process. When we talk about the 'problem' we need to start from asking who is talking and whose perspective we are taking, is it an observation by the researcher? Who marks a particular issue as a problem? Working *with* our participants requires a different modus operandi, one though that is very relevant to workplace discourse.

The research 'problem' is often used interchangeably with the other terms such as research 'area', 'topic', and 'goal'. Creswell (2005) covers well the relationship between these terms. Simply speaking these terms indicate a move from the general to the specific. The reader can find many illustrations which depict the process as follows:

> Research area > topic > problem > questions > methodology > methods/tools
> > data collection > interpretation > new questions/insights

In line with what I argued earlier on the concentric spheres, this process is not conclusive and opens doors to new dimensions and related issues that feed into the original problem. Placing the problem at centre of the enquiry provides scope for positioning the project within specific disciplinary boundaries but also crossing them (see multidisciplinary enquiry 4.11) and for connecting the here and now of the enquiry with the wider and bigger questions of the environment within which we operate. It also allows one to connect with the work of other (academic and non-academic) professionals who also address or face the same problem.

5.4 Where do these problems come from?

One common advice novice researchers get is to consult the literature and look for identified 'gaps'. This is of course sound. Important to remember however is that the 'literature' is not 'one' homogenous unit where everybody agrees on what the gaps and priorities are. This book has already shown that in issues around culture, language, and the workplace, there are conflicting views and traditions and associated agendas. Coming new to field means that there are no points of reference that can guide the enquiry. The influential theories, scholars, methods, and so on are part of what a community of researchers shares but this is not immediately visible to an outsider. There is a process of socialisation into a community which includes

engaging with the dominant discourses and traditions of the community. Trying to grasp the current status quo in workplace sociolinguistics is not as straightforward as we make it sound sometimes. Research is situated and there are groups and research networks nearby which can provide a source of inspiration and support, and of course, for those who work with a supervisor, working productively with them is a valuable recourse.

Apart from the literature and the work of others, it is often the case that the researcher has observed or feels that something is worth researching. The 'observation', 'hunch', or 'instinct' is in my view a valuable resource. A lot of good research starts from personal interest. Obviously the 'hunch' needs to be positioned within context and to be supported by literature. Feeling lost and 'stuck' in readings is not an indication of lack of good ideas or ability, it just indicates a need for stepping back and organising thoughts and reading systematically.

5.5 'Is my project more suitable for a QUAN or QUAL design?' – From binaries to a holistic research perspective

This is a question that allows multiple answers: first of all, it can be taken at face value: it is indeed the case that certain topics and questions lend themselves more to one or the other paradigm. At the same time, however it is a question that always makes me uneasy because of the connotations associated with the terms. QUAL/QUAN are category labels that are often mobilised by researchers in hegemonic narratives of research praxis and used to index quality and skill.

Any research project necessitates a simplification of the world and the use of categories, frameworks and typologies are conceptual tools for exploring multilayered relationships and phenomena. Hence the QUAL/QUAN binary has been critical for advancing theoretical frameworks and methodologies for years. The debates have also been significant identity acts for groups of researchers who challenged the status quo. In the current context however, where multidisciplinarity is becoming a necessity, the tools of the past can also be limited.

What I see in this struggle is the difficulty to use a set of predetermined categories and binaries to frame their interest and thinking. This is, to me, the actual core of the issue: the ways in which we understand and frame workplace research are changing, particularly in the current multidisciplinary context. QUAN/QUAL tools form part of the ongoing process of understanding workplace linguistic practice, they coexist and constitute part of a holistic approach to research practice; this is a necessity for understanding complex phenomena and systems such as any workplace.

5.6 How do I best recruit participants?

The workplace as a research site requires the researcher to be creative, imaginative, rigorous and adaptable at the same time. Going to the field with preconceived designs is limiting. Similarly attempting to work with a sample of businesses

or participants without establishing what is available can lead to disappointment. When new to a site I always advise my students to spend about a week getting a feel for the organisation and its ways of working. Detailed notes can help the researcher organise their observations and guide their decisions later on.

Tips for recruiting:

a)   During the pre-pilot phase of your research you can talk to your informants and explore whether there are some who are receptive to the idea of becoming research collaborators and recording parts of their interactions.

b)   You need to provide the informants who will agree to participate with instructions (and equipment) as to how/what to record.

c)   Practical considerations . . . think of equipment and quality of recordings.

d)   Think carefully of your sample (see Litosseliti, 2010), whose perspective have you (not) included. How much can you realistically do and who do you report to. The latter is very important for the ethics of the study.[1]

An Appreciative Enquiry (AI) approach can be particularly useful in facilitating workplace research but also in enabling change and participation.

The aim of workplace discourse research is to unpack how things work and the different angles of a problem. This should however be carefully handled when 'problems' are related to specific practices, behaviours, or roles in a professional setting. The term comes with strong negative connotations of what is not working or what a particular team, department, or individual does not do well (or any other evaluative judgment). This being the case, it is not a good starting point for a research relationship. Starting from the best practices available is always a better positioning for the project and collaboration with the participants. This is in line with the AI agenda.

AI is collaborative and participatory in nature and aims to identify and further enhance the strengths of an organisation (e.g., Ludema et al., 2003). This is not about banning the 'negative' or 'biasing' the study towards 'positive'. These labels depend on the standpoint of the speaker. AI looks into good practice and collective future change. AI is associated with the work of Cooperrider (see e.g., Cooperrider et al., 2008) and draws on different methods, although interviews and focus groups are particularly prominent. AI is particularly well suited for workplace discourse research as the organisation is constructed "in the stories people tell each other every day, and the story of the organisation is constantly being co-authored" (Bushe, 2012: 91). AI draws on four stages: a) the *discovery* stage – during which the frame and core of the inquiry is co-constructed by the participants; b) the *dream* stage – during which the participants are negotiating the 'ideal'; c) the *design* stage – during which the team aims to come up with a concrete implementation plan and which leads to the fourth; and the final stage that of the d) *delivery*. Bushe (2011, 2012) discusses well the 4D method in his work. What is particularly relevant to our discussion is that AI sits very comfortably under the social constructionist

paradigm and provides the researcher with tools to focus on the generative capacity (Gergen, 1978, 1982) of research for challenging the common sense and increasing the relevance of the research for the participants. It is also well aligned with the problem based agenda which is at the heart of applied linguistics and sociolinguistic scholarship and the model of the reflexive practitioner (Jones and Stubbe, 2004). What it practically looks like for the workplace researcher depends on the topic and personal style of each one of us, but it presupposes a shared ownership of the topic and a commitment to working with our participants as an ongoing process.

The workplace researcher is, by definition, working in a sensitive context and with sensitive data. Sensitivity is defined on the basis of the confidentiality of the data and the implications or harm for the participants or other parties depending on the topic and data. This all makes access challenging as we have seen, it is also the case that research topics or sites are associated with issues the media have raised and subjected to bad publicity. AI affords a stronger relationship which in the short term can provide better access and data but in the long term it also affords research becoming a catalyst for change. Understanding what people perceive as strengths is in itself very useful. The workplace researcher is also more often than not interested in implications and applications of the research for training purposes. In the current context where a lot of work-related training and ICC more particularly revolves around what is broken and needs fixing, taking an AI perspective and working with participants throughout the cycle of a project is a much more productive way for guiding change.

5.7 How do I do AI in workplace research?

a) Introduce the AI perspective in the information for participants documents and early on in meetings with stakeholders.

b) Discuss with your key contacts how they could support you in making your research known to everybody in a particular workplace – e.g., can you take a few minutes in a staff meeting or at a quiet time in a shift where all team is together.

c) Spend time in the original stages of the research, what is it that your participants seem to be interested in? how far/close is it from your agenda? Don't shy away from discussing explicitly what would be more useful for your participants.

d) If training is involved in what you are offering, work with your participants in designing and delivering.

5.8 How do I learn to 'see' in ethnographic studies?

A question I am often asked at this stage is 'what am I looking for'. The frustration here is that the answer is everything. Good ethnography gets sharper and more focused the more the researcher 'unlocks' different doors.

I do not call this stage as 'data collection' given that this happens throughout. It is the peak of the fieldwork activity and during this stage the workplace researcher

needs to organise their data to maximise their presence and minimise stealing time unnecessarily.

I advise my students to block time for reflection, reading/drawing, and managing emotions during fieldwork. I also suggest organising and start the analysis process during that stage. This will help with going back to the informant for clarifications and further questions. And during this process making copious notes and keeping records is paramount as short–term memory capacity is limited. One my key annoyances with a lot of work that claims an ethnographic identity is an approach to fieldwork that has been described as 'grab and go' or 'smash and grab' ethnography. Both metaphors are quite telling; while ethnography books spend a lot of time in preparing the researcher for the complexities of getting 'in' and 'on' there is relatively less on exit or the 'out' stage (Gobo and Molle, 2017). The end of the fieldwork is certainly not the end of the number of site visits a researcher can afford. The workplace analyst needs the participants for interpreting their data as we have seen, beyond this though it is the researcher's responsibility is to consider how the knowledge can benefit those in the site. The relationship with the participants in any project needs to be governed by mutual respect and collaboration, hence the researcher running away with piles of questionnaires or interviews, observations, or recordings is in my view against the very spirit of ethnography as a paradigm.

5.9 How do I know I am using the right toolkit?

Specific methods for data collection have a long history in social sciences in general and workplace research in particular. Observations as well as interviews and surveys are cases in point and are still widely used by researchers (Angouri and Piekkari, 2017). There is no need for me to extensively discuss what different datasets do, Creswell (2013) or Dörnyei (2007) and Fielding and Thomas (2001), amongst hundreds of others, do this very well and the reader of this book has certainly experienced designing and carrying out at least some. I provide some tips and advice as an overview here.

5.10 How do I keep fieldnotes and observations?

Being in the field is exciting, social, and fun but also frustrating, isolating, and awkward. These are just some of the evaluations I hear often. Depending on how seasoned the researcher is, the emotional side of fieldwork can be considerable. The researcher carries their own training and ideologies, the worldview, and skills which impact on what we 'see' and how we record.

Observations and observation data have a long tradition in research methodology and there is abundance of materials. Observation data allow to complement other tools – so the researcher can *see* what they would miss through other tools such as interviews. And they will see things that the interviewees may be unable or unwilling to talk about. Hence the analyst can then move beyond individual perceptions

and opinions (see Cohen et al., 2000: 305) to patterns that emerge from the group. Cohen et al. (2000) suggest that observations enable the researcher to gather data on: the *physical*, *human*, and *interactional* setting and this is well in line with Hymes's work. The importance of Hymes's SPEAKING for the workplace discourse analyst was discussed earlier (Introduction). And Blommaert (2006) has written on Hymes's influence on linguistic anthropology and the development of thinking in linguistic ethnography. Hymes's work is excellent conceptually as well as practically for preparing for fieldwork. The different contextual layers Hymes draws attention on provide a good frame for self-training and for learning to 'see'. The researcher in the field needs to ask and provide answers to a series of questions, amongst which the most relevant are these: What is going on? What does it mean and for whom? Why do I think this has this particular meaning? For the workplace researcher, and probably any ethnographer, the process of analysis involves "guessing at meanings" (Geertz, 1973: 20). This process of guessing needs to be based on a clear and systematic rationale–some evidence that the researcher is able to see at the stage of observing.

Practice is important here. Working on own note taking through observing mundane activities is an excellent way to prepare and develop skills and mechanisms.

Tips for recording observation in workplace discourse research:

a)   You don't want to be seen to take notes – this puts people in a 'lab animal' position which will backfire as you will then be positioned as the 'researcher'
b)   Practice before you go to the field, can you take fieldnotes of your friend preparing dinner?
c)   Relax – Allow yourself to immerse instead of constantly trying to make 'mental notes'
d)   Record your own emotions and what seems to be striking
e)   Use a template that works for you

5.11 What is the value of self-reported data?

Self-reported data provide a window in the perceived experience of the participants and as such allow the researcher to explore different angles of any problem or topic. Research methods books provide long lists of the strengths of self-reported data. Some of the key features which are particularly relevant to workplace research are discussed later. Before turning to the specifics a key point: questionnaires tend to be associated with quantitative research and statistics and interviews/focus groups with qualitative enquiry. The rationale for this assumption is pretty old and tired: a questionnaire can address key variables and 'test' hypotheses while interviews can be used to 'explore' topics, or questionnaires aim to be objective and free from researchers' bias are all too common. These and other similar statements can be conceptually limiting as already discussed.

Going back to the concentric circles model, no 'tool' is or can be one or the other. A questionnaire is designed by a researcher, who is a human being situated in time and space and influenced by dominant ways of thinking and 'seeing' the world. There is nothing 'objective' in this. Equally eliciting data in an interview context can easily test a hypothesis if this is what we set out to do. So the case to make is one for the 'reflexive practitioner' who takes a critical position towards the research activity and acknowledges that binaries and strict categories are not in sync with the complexity of the questions social science research aims to grasp.

5.11.1 A closer look at interviews

Interviews provide a way into accessing some layers of the participants' realities. They are one of the most popular tools for novice and experienced researchers and are commonly used to explore aspects of organisational life. The interview context provides the researcher with an opportunity to create a space for a unique encounter with someone who has experience of the problem and knowledge that is relevant to the researcher's question. The interview genre per se is beyond my interest here – the reader can find chapters in any dedicated research methods text-book and collections (see Litosseliti, 2010). Despite all the material, however, I see every year my students struggling with carrying out and handling interview data. A key question that is recurrent is the following:

5.11.2 Is it a valid data collection method for workplace sociolinguistics? What do we gain?

> Silverman: interviews do indeed display realities which extend beyond the reality of conversational practices, so that when interviews take place, we witness both artful and universal practices and the display of cultural particulars expressing variable social practices.
>
> (1985: 170)

Interviews, and focus groups, have been tremendously useful to workplace research. So the answer is certainly yes. Sociolinguists have for many years criticised the over-reliance on self-reported data as the Labovian tradition (e.g., Labov, 1996) has shown that intuition on language use is limited. Although sociolinguistic research of the time was concerned with language structure and dialect use, the same mismatch has been shown in accounts of discourse practices in the workplace (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003). In other words, interviews were criticised for providing an account of what people *think* they do instead of what they *do* do.

Workplace sociolinguists take a critical stance towards using interviews "as reports rather than accounts" (Richards, 2009: 158), an approach still common in different parts of applied linguistics and in ICC literature (Aneas and Sandin, 2009). And the field remained committed to other forms of interaction. In line with CA

literature which approached interviews as co-constructed accounts from the outset (see e.g., Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2008 for an overview), workplace sociolinguists either used interviews, analysed for content, as a secondary dataset when part of multimethod studies, or they focused on how the participants positioned self/other in the interview event. If however we take interviews as constructs, they then provide with a valuable source of data on role performance and perception.

Interviews are a flexible tool and one which can generate a lot of data in a relatively short time. It also affords going into sensitive and complex topics in order to either explore or complement the picture emerging from other tools – commonly questionnaires but also observations in ethnographic research. What is important to note here though is that interviews are situated in time and space and co-constructed between the actors involved, the interviewer and the interviewee. Hence the 'interview' is a performance, not an account of 'real' facts but a co-construction between the participant and interviewer (Edley and Litosseliti, 2010). This is in line with the stance this book takes as well as current thinking in workplace discourse research. Interviews are accounts and not the 'truth' in people's heads. They are negotiated and emerge in the situated 'here and now' of talk and have significance for both parties. It is the researcher's responsibility to interpret the data for what they are; for instance an autobiographical interview is not a factual recounting of events but a performance *for* and *with* the researcher. Interviews can take the form of a juxtaposition of monologues and conversation. The monologue parts are, in my experience, rare. In most cases the two parties interact and built the topic together. Holstein and Gubrium (2004: 147) argue, correctly in my view, that "interviews are conversations where meanings are not only conveyed, but cooperatively built up, received, interpreted, and recorded by the interviewer".

The researcher needs to be quick in reacting, use the right prompt and grab opportunities for going deeper into the topic. As with any other research tools, the interview schedule is the output of planning the work (and reviewing relevant literature), writing the big and smaller questions, piloting the interview, and revising. Only then the researcher is ready to carry out the work. Interviewees are considered flexible and they are, but this does not mean that the researcher follows a whole range of different leads every time. Interviews need to strike the right balance between discipline and risk taking in exploring a potential new angle.

5.11.3 Tips for interviewing in a workplace

Always go to the interview well prepared and be prepared to either be asked to reschedule or for you to ask to reschedule if you see your interviewee under a lot of stress, pressure, or in the context of a crisis at work. Don't forget that a workplace setting is a busy environment where things happen, emergencies will understandably be your interviewees' priority so no point in having the interview. If you have the option, ask your interviewees when/where is a quiet time to meet and often outside the peak working hours is a good idea. Make sure you don't turn the

interview to an interrogation. A quick succession of questions and the researcher holding the floor tightly is common but uncomfortable. Learning to listen is difficult and the temptation to keep 'control' of the process is understandable. But it is a temptation that needs to be resisted; opening and sharing the floor leads to better quality data. Finally interviews depend a lot on the rapport we build with the interviewees. Investing in a relationship and spending time in a research setting allows the researcher to be seen and recognised as a trustworthy interactant.

5.11.4 What is the researcher's influence on interviews? – And other matters of truth and lies

It is common in academic writing to come across statements suggesting that the interviewer attempted to 'not intervene' or 'bias' the interviewee or to 'let the experience' show. These widely used statements illustrate well the influence of the positivist paradigm in research methodology and discourse as discussed earlier. In terms of the actual interview, keeping this level of distance constitutes as impossibility; any dyadic interaction is a co-constructed and negotiated event between those involved. Hence in line with what has been discussed already, the interviewer is as much as agent in the interview as the interviewee. Subjectivity is inherent in the process as is inherent in any research activity. As far as interviews are concerned, the relationship between the interviewer/ee is not relevant in some abstract manner, it is dynamic and unfolds in the event. An interview where the two parties perceive they 'get on well' goes into a different path to one where the rapport does not work. Razon and Ross (2012) provide a good example on how their American–Israeli female student identities was made relevant in their work and affected the ways in which research participants in Israel engaged with their interviewer power. I agree with their claim that "interviews [. . .] are a contingent process in which spontaneity and creativity, as well as tension and conflict, are produced on the parts of both interviewee and interviewer" (2012: 496). Hence the important of the relationship is not only relevant before and after the event (Lather, 1986) and the researcher's role is central.

This does not mean that the researcher should not prepare and reflect on what they bring to the event. To the contrary, the interviewer reacts to the researcher's prompts up to a certain extent, although the interviewees also have their own agendas. Let us unpack this a bit further.

Fielding and Thomas (2001) amongst other have provided helpful lists on how and why interview data may be 'unreliable'). And they argue that respondents may only offer logical reasons for their opinions and actions, when the *real* (emphasis mine) reason for their opinions and actions may be emotional or evaluative. I very much agree with the words of caution in taking interview data at face value. My objection is related to whether or not interviews provide access to the real reasons or what my students often ask me, how do they know they (the interviewees) tell us (the interviewers) the *truth*. The meaning of those words very much depends

on the philosophical stance we take. In my view the interviewee puts forward one representation of their reality which is very real but also part of *one of many realities*.

Similarly, other common issues raised concern the respondents being over–polite, shy, or anxious to impress the interviewer. They might 'tell the interviewer what they think the interviewer wants to hear' or what can influence the research findings and get reported to those high up in the chain. In workplace research, it is also common for the interviewee to want to 'use' the interviewer and the research for raising visibility, exercising influence, protesting against the centres of power, or an infinite number of other motivations and agendas that are invisible to the researcher. This again is a normal part of the way in which we engage with the events in our daily lives. In a busy workplace context, the researcher, often introduced through senior or middle management, is positioned within a system of political relationships and imbalances. Hence attempting to use the researcher's agenda is expected and, in itself, interesting. How can the interviewer then dig deep? This of course depends on the topic and the project but the interview quality increases when the design allows for longitudinal or at least more than one interviews with the same participants and following a good understanding of their context – as is the case with ethnographic or ethnographically informed designs.

An understanding of those complexities is important for the quality of the data for how the researcher prepares and plans their tools. Interviews are often considered a 'forgiving' tool, where the researcher is in control and able to adapt and adjust in the course of an interview session. This however can be rather narrow; our participants engage with the interviewer through their own lenses; the more the researcher succeeds in creating a relationship beyond the researcher/participant divide the more the chances for getting richer and thicker (Geertz, 1973) accounts.

Particularly for the workplace researcher "issues of identity, roles, authority, and credibility" (Roberts and Sarangi, 2003: 339) are directly related to the way the study is positioned and by extension to the quality and quantity of data we collect. Being aware of who our sample is and what else is going on at the time of a project is relevant for understanding our participants and the reading of the data.

This is relevant not only in the collection but also in interpretation of the data.

5.11.5 Coding and making sense of interview data, how do I do it?

One of the biggest challenges for the workplace analyst is to make sense of the data. On the first level, all researchers need to be able to *transition* from raw text to data through a process of organising and managing the conflicting meanings in the dataset. The usual way of going about this is by "assigning tags or labels to the data [. . .] [by] condensing the bulk of our data sets into analyzable units by creating categories [. . .]. This process is usually referred to as coding". (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 26). Coding, in one form or another, constitutes a core part of data management and this is particularly relevant to interview and focus

group data. Coding constitutes a form of thematic grouping or thematic organising of the data. Through coding the researcher can organise, retrieve, and eventually interpret the data. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) provide an excellent overview of different approaches to coding and a number of other recent ones followed (see Section 5.14). The important point to retain is that through the coding we can both *simplify* and *complexify* our data.

Let's unpack this: successful interviews tend to be lengthy and if the researcher engages in a repeat design this increases both the quality but also the volume of data. Successful interview data are also messy, "the nature of qualitative data means that data relating to one particular topic are not found neatly bundled together at exactly the same spot in each interview". (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 35). Accordingly, in order to make sense of this material the researcher needs to organise to categories and to attribute meaning. This involves an interpretative process where the researcher needs to select what are the significant, representative, and meaningful parts of the data. Through this process of reducing the complexity of the data the researcher organises the material in a manageable number of categories. Following the process of *simplification*, the research can then knit together meanings and dig deeper in the findings. The process of analysis of the data is iterative (Silverman, 2013). Coding processes vary but typically we distinguish between codes (the micro level), categories (the codes grouped together), and themes the overarching emergent findings through organising the categories together. The meso level, namely the categories, constitutes the heart of the process and one that links a micro instance of interaction to the bigger picture. The process of coding needs to be systematic, otherwise the analyst will either cherry pick (see Morse, 2010) or get lost in the text. The steps I advise my students to take echo most of the relevant writing I have come across (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996 is a very useful read):

> Read a number of times and familiarise yourself with the data > write down what stands out–initial observations that come to mind > go line by line and identify codes > group them in categories > review and refine > look for relationships between the categories > review and refine > search for themes > review and refine > . . .

The organisation of the codes and the iterative meaning attribution process is commonly referred to as 'thematic analysis'. It involves the process of reading and rereading (Rice and Ezzy, 1999; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) and the process of "identifying, analysing and reporting" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79) recurring patterns or themes. In Boyatzis's (1998: 4) view, a theme "is a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon". In this context the role of the researcher using thematic analysis is to identify patterns that capture important information in relation to the overall research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and evaluate how these patterns relate to the studied phenomenon.

This of course is an idealised process and one that makes it look tidy and neat. The reality of the process is, as put by Erickson (2004), that data are found in the text and patters do not 'emerge' – a verb that brings connotations for naturalness and objectiveness – but again are found by the researcher. A researcher familiar with the activities of a site or a particular work-related 'problem' will read the same data differently to a researcher coming new to the field.

Further to this, the process of the analysis of the data is often distinguished in *top > down* and *bottom > up* designs. The former refers to a process whereby the researcher has already decided, on the basis of the literature, theory or key studies, the core categories to look for in the text. In this case the starting point is outside the data itself and the researcher organises the material drawing on previous knowledge. This is compared to a situation where the researcher attempts to engage with the material with an open mind and by first describing what is going on in the data. In reality this distinction is artificial and the two extreme ends are both misleading and rather referring to the researcher's ideals. The process is always somewhere in the middle. The analyst is not and cannot take a tabula rasa position. Before carrying out any interviews, the analyst/student/professional academic has already read, written, and observed relevant information. The framing of the whole data collection process is theory driven. Equally it is limiting to go into a dataset ignoring what stands out or where the dataset does not fit with previous reading and theory. So it is never an either/or. The process of coding the data is frustrating and rewarding at the same time, it is also easy to get carried away and forget the purpose of the analysis and the link with the questions one study seeks to address. Although research questions can evolve in the context of a study, this is not to invite 'where the winds blows' research. Coding is a discipline testing and tested exercise.

The process of coding should be consistent to the theoretical standpoint- or allow a new one to emerge. If for instance a study takes a constructionist perspective, the coding cannot be based on positivist categorisations. And if the researcher has committed themselves to analysing interviews from an interactional perspective, this will need to be reflected in the transcription as well as coding of the data. The balance between *what people say* and *how they say it* is very relevant here.

And finally and very importantly we need to know when to stop! The coding process needs to strike the right balance between a superficial and naïve description of the data and going deeper and deeper and beyond the context of the study. The research questions are critical in guiding the researcher's quest and the deciding when to stop.

To summarise, the process involves two big stages: an inductive descriptive stage followed by the deductive interpretive one. The first stage involves:

a) Transcription > first codes – categories > first round of themes
b) Reviewing and organising > finalise categories and themes > development of the map

The interpretation of the data is not straightforward and questions of *warrantability*, evidence in the text analysed for any inferences the researcher makes are core issues in working with data in general but discourse data in particular.

5.11.6 Discourse-based interviews

Involving the participants in analysis sessions is not a method only used for the interpretation of interactional data. In interviews and focus groups, it has been common to run transcripts and findings past the participants and/or to share the analysis and key findings. The notion of discourse-based interviews is particularly well suited for engaging the participants in providing accounts for linguistic practices in their workplace.

Typically before the analysis the participants are shown selected excerpts of the texts that constitute the body of the corpus. They are invited to talk the researcher through and offer their account of 'what is going on' in the event. This is in line with the IS's playback sessions according to which recordings are played back to the participants who offer their accounts and interpretations. Post analyses, the researcher's second order accounts are shared with the participants and this creates more spaces for further interaction between first and second order perspectives. The participants contribute with their contextual knowledge and bring "all that [they] consider relevant to the interpretation of that event at the time" (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997: 44).

Odell et al.'s work (1983) is very useful and could provide a good addition to the workplace sociolinguist's toolkit. Odell et al. (1983) show that linguistic features which seem 'insignificant' (1983: 231) may be "a sensitive indicator of a writer's complex understanding of the rhetorical context and ways for them to achieve their purpose within that context". Although they refer to written texts, this approach is well aligned with the stance taken in this volume and the emphasis on understanding situated language use.

I am turning to transcription issues next.

5.12 How to decide on a transcription approach?

Discourse analysts' analytical choices and loyalties are reflected in the process of transcription and there are excellent transcription guides under each DA tradition. The detailed analysis of the interaction is a 'black box' of what is going on in a particular event and allows the analyst to see what happens in situ. For the discourse analyst the aim of the analysis is what to explore what Labov noted as "language as it is used in everyday life by members of the social order, that vehicle of communication in which they argue with their wives, joke with their friends and deceive their enemies" (Labov, 1972: xiii). In order to achieve this, an appropriate transcript is necessary. Transcription is not a one size fits all and it is both unrealistic and

impossible to transcribe everything. The fact that transcription is theory has been well discussed by Ochs (1979) and many others.

The process of transcription is a process of representation of the most salient features of a conversation or interaction. In order to define what 'salient' means and by extension what is actually transcribed, the focus of the research and the researcher's standpoint is critical. A CA analyst will approach the task from a different angle compared to their CDA counterpart. No matter what approach we take, a transcript is always a compromise. Reading a written text, which in effect is any transcript, is very different to the embodied nature of communication and the information that is exchanged in situ. So the transcript is a snapshot which allows and has allowed the field to get a good understanding of how interaction works but which at the same time is already the filtered outcome of a decision making process the analyst went through. To take this further, a project's research questions as well as pragmatic considerations such as the time or resources available will influence if not determine how much information the analyst should/can include in the transcript.

The transcript then is an artefact constructed by the researcher and it should be approached as such. Although we often present the transcript as the starting point of the analysis, it is useful to situate it in the process and explicitly acknowledge its limitations. The researcher needs to be selective about what is marked in the transcript and what degree of detail it goes into. "It is worth remembering that too much detail can be as unsatisfactory as too little. There is a trade-off between accuracy and detail on one hand and clarity and readability on the other" (Cameron, 2001: 39). What is worth including in a transcript depends on what we want to do with it afterwards – there is no good reason or virtue in spending time transcribing features the researcher will not analyse. This may change in the process, and it is the case that the more we develop skills in data analysis the more we see the data from different angles, but a clear rationale guiding the transcription process is a core part of the research.

5.13 So I now have turned 'talk' to 'text', what's next? How to turn 'talk' to 'data'

This depends on how systematic the process has been to this point. A transcript in and by itself is not the end product. What marks the transition from raw material to data is the systematic handling of the process, the material collected, the transcription in relation to specific research objectives or questions, and the application of a set of conventions with the intention to perform particular analytical operations. Already in the pre-recording stage the researcher makes decisions as to what, how much, and how to record. Sometimes the researcher's leeway is very narrow given the strict access rules. The more the researcher gets known in a field the more it is becoming easier to access contexts that were invisible from the outset.

Experienced workplace analysts always plan to collect more material to what it is strictly needed. The reasons for this are to make up for technical problems –

inaudible data, faults with the equipment and generally technology, as well as issues which may prevent the analyst from using the material – e.g., participants' requests to withdraw. The importance of casting a wide net is not only instrumentally useful, but it also allows for a richer dataset.

In line with the IS perspective I take, I support the view that inviting the participants' readings of the data or organising playback sessions of recordings where the participants talk the analyst through what is going on are particularly beneficial. This playback technique draws on the Gumperzian tradition and recent work on reflexive methodologies (Iedema and Scheeres, 2003).

During the process of collection of material and data, it is also advisable for the analyst to play through and listen a number of times. Familiarising self with the material, as an ongoing process, is critical for decisions on how and where to turn one's gaze depending on the focus of the work and time constraints. It is common for researchers to choose specific instances for the analysis and transcription. Quality of the recordings, continuity of the topics and a map of the participants involved, provide the researcher with tools to explore particular themes or practices in observations and interviews. Although, for many, transcription is considered a one off task, this is, actually, only partly true. Any analysis involves re-analysis. In the context of workplace discourse, it is common to go back and either collect further information and different datasets or make links the researcher was not in a position to see at the time of the first transcription which may require going back and looking closer at the transcripts.

To summarise and illustrate (some of) the issues raised in this chapter, the next few pages include an account written by former PhD student/current collaborator Ifigenia Mahili. I asked Ifigenia to share her experience and what she feels she learned beyond the, self-evident, subject knowledge through engaging with a diverse dataset. Ifigenia reflects on how she went through the coding process in order to decide what is important in her data. This is provided unedited to allow Ifigenia's voice to come across.

5.14 A worked example

5.14.1 What was the project about

This project was about the investigation of variation in the products and processes of eight Multinational Organisations based in Greece. It was structured in two parts: the first part reported on how and why writing products and practices differ in terms of formality according to the perceptions of the employees. Taking a micro perspective, the second part focused on the most dominant genre, that of business email in terms of the functions it served and the (in)formal linguistic features that were used. Particular attention was paid to the interrelation between formality and power, social distance and socialisation. I adopted a mixed method approach that was primarily qualitative. My stance is in line with those who argue for holistic research in order to address the complexity of issues involved in workplace interaction.

Drawing from the questionnaire results, the quantitative data was intended to give a background picture of workplace writing. The qualitative data would then be drawn from the interviews and the written samples to dig deeper into the complexity of how employees communicate and why they say they do so.

With a view to foregrounding the perceptions of the participants, I adopted a bottom–up emic approach rather than seek answers to predetermined questions. So I utilised tools that enabled me to let the data speak first and ensure that what the participants felt was important would be reflected in the study. In September 2009 I started by making contacts from a list of potentially interested parties, followed by visits to their workplaces where observations on their habitual practices were recorded in note form. This gave me a better understanding of the context I was to investigate and the chance to establish trust and rapport. Approval was soon followed by the distribution of the background questionnaire as an initial source of information. The plan was to then conduct two types of interviews: semi-structured interviews based on the questionnaire would give me more detailed information about the companies' written products and processes. Once the written samples were collected and studied, discourse-based interviews would follow to seek information into the use of the particular formal and informal discourse features used from their writers.

5.14.2 Semi-structured interviews – Rationale and design of semi-structured interviews

Upon completion of the questionnaire, the participants were invited to take part in a follow-up interview. Intending to verify and enrich the questionnaire data and to urge the participants to reflect more on the writing and the process they engage in, these semi-structured interviews were mainly structured around the questionnaire items, but flexibility was carefully maintained to enable the interviewees to expand more on their own problems and areas of interest. The first two interviews with participants working in two different companies were designated as pilot ones. Interviews proved to be a valuable supplementary tool for exploring the issues raised in the questionnaire in much more depth and breadth. They were an excellent opportunity to ask clarification questions, to correct misunderstandings, and effectively supplement the background information collected from the questionnaire.

Due to the widely known difficulties that accessing a business setting poses, I used a convenience sampling strategy by interviewing people who were willing to help but made sure to include participants from a variety of subgroups according to size/type of company, level of post, and years of experience. As Table 5.1 shows, out of the seventeen people who were interviewed, five were working in MNCs and eleven in smaller international companies. The sample included seven post holders and nine managers, out of which five were newcomers and eleven were old–timers. The volunteer basis on which the sampling was conducted cannot make it representative of the population employed in the corporate sector or in either one of the subgroups. The sampling procedure adheres to the principles and 'logic' of qualitative research to represent salient characteristics and in depth and variable details and not statistical representation.

5.14.3 Analysis of semi-structured interviews – Development of themes

In the analysis of the data, I used a combination of inductive and deductive thematic analysis in the search for "repeated patterns of meaning" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 86). I transcribed the interviews reproducing the semantic meaning of the talk without details of its delivery. In accordance with the purpose of the analysis, to look for semantic themes salient to the research questions, I thought that the analysis is concerned with the content of the interviews and not with details like pauses, overlaps, and phonetic and phonological aspects. The various stages of the analysis can be seen in the table.

The first phase involved reading and rereading the dataset a number of times to achieve familiarity and gain a good understanding. The second phase, still a descriptive phase of analysis, involved the generation of initial codes, the first attempt to approach the most basic segments of the raw data in a meaningful way i.e., more extended pieces of the data were manually coded by writing notes on the right column of the text analysed. Following an inductive data driven rather than theory driven approach, the aim was to code the entire dataset by "giving full and equal attention to each data item" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 89), making sure nothing was left out at this stage. The next phase involved generating initial themes, by sorting the codes into potential themes. This was done manually by writing notes in the third column on the right of the codes and colour coding them to make them easily distinguishable. Additional thoughts on alternative themes that might work in later stages were also noted in pencil further on the right. This is shown in Figure 5.1.

Although this stage involved starting to consider possible relations among the codes and initial themes, it consistently remained a descriptive data driven phase so as to retain as much of the information as possible. In an attempt to gain a better understanding of the whole picture of the main themes, I started to form preliminary broad categories and place the themes under these categories by drawing mind maps on paper. For example trying to better understand the data on writing problems, I clustered all the information on writing problems around five categories (see Figure 5.2): the types of problems faced, divided into initial and persistent ones, who faced them, and effective and ineffective ways of facing them. Ultimately presenting as much of the data as possible in one figure (even only the data relating to writing problems) entails reducing/eliminating some of the subordinate ideas. This means sacrificing some thoroughness at this stage but gaining from the macro

TABLE 5.1 Process of thematic analysis

Inductive descriptive approach	Stage 1: Transcription of dataset Stage 2: Generation of codes Stage 3: Generation of initial themes
Deductive interpretive approach	Stage 4: Reviewing and sorting themes Stage 5: Generation of final themes Stage 6: Naming super-themes and developing thematic map

Data extract (translated from Greek to English)	Initial Codes	Initial themes

FIGURE 5.1   An example of coding and development of initial themes

picture. Consequently, although all of potential themes that emerged in the previous stage were represented in the mind map, some slight adjustments in naming and categorising them had to be made. For example, the potential theme "Effective solution → experience" in Figure 5.1 was changed into the broader thematic category of "Writing problems faced through" and its subcategory of "experience".

I also noted the initials of their names to allow myself to later calculate frequencies and find points of agreement and variations in perceptions later on although this was not my main concern at that stage. An example is shown in Figure 5.2.

The following phases were more interpretive than descriptive. Decisions started being taken on their relation with each other, their importance and relevance to the research questions at hand and to the relevant literature. Initially this was done by stepping away from the macro picture of the mind map and by rereading the interview transcriptions again and writing more extensively in each supra theme (e.g., on writing problems) on separate pieces of paper. This is shown in Figure 5.3.

The interpretations and personal reflections are highlighted. This enabled me to crosscheck the themes that had already emerged and allowed more themes that
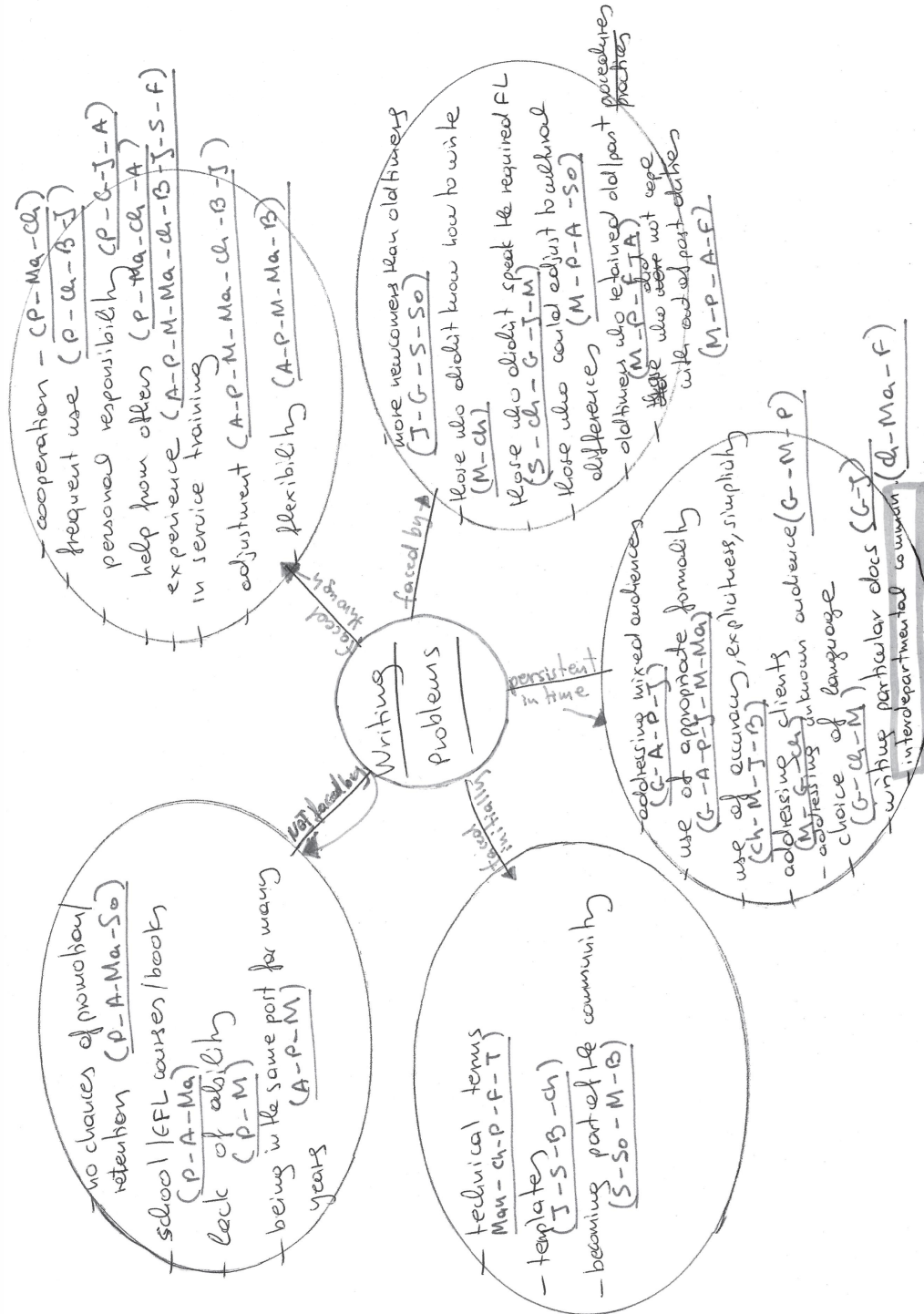
FIGURE 5.2 Clustering themes into broad categories

FIGURE 5.3 Crosschecking existing themes

could not have formed in my initial descriptive look at the data in the coding stage in an iterative process. For example, at this stage the theme of "company policy", "email–CCing", and "choice of language" emerged for the first time and my 'initial thoughts' on style and content in Figure 5.1 changed into themes in Figure 5.3. The relations that developed among them are noted by the circles and arrows as shown in Figure 5.4.

As the themes and their relations were redeveloped, the codes were rearranged in a continuous process of reviewing and refining as well as well as rereading the

Problems in written communication

(Chr) - each dep. had its own lang + didn't adjust
to other deps. → explanations
problem
(writer oriented rather than reader oriented)
(depart is related to area of expertise + type of profession)

context → clarity
explicitness

- subordinates (in his team) didn't know how to address
superiors (senior managers) → formality
(vertical com. → probl.

style → formality

(G) - technical writer (hired for technical docs) had good knowledge
of Engl but still could not write the docs - G → did them, instead.
(parties outside the (off.)/company didn't know the lang/terms
required for technical docs)

context → technical
terms
fitting in

- company employees who could write → technical docs had
difficulty being understood by clients
(wrote didn't write simply enough for clients).

context → simplicity

() - - As senior manager his immediate response was forwarded
to parties w/out his knowing → she didn't know which lang
to write in (Engl or Greek) + how formal we should
be (unknown audience + CC'ing function → probl.)

local Engl.
choice of lang.
style → formality
email - CC'ing

() - newcomers wrote their weekly report capital letters + used inappropriate
greetings, wordy lang, colloquial lang, often subjective
in their judgements (A report to the immediate superior supervisor
was often forwarded to even higher levels causing the
supervisor to correct it himself (unknown audience -
vertical communic. → probl.)

style → formality
email - CC'ing

(P) - old-timers would just walk into the manager's office
and tell him orally instead of writing a report
(lack of adjustment to changes - old-timers retaining old practices)

company policy
(structure) +
allowed it

(M) - old-timers skipped steps in the procedure of preparing
a tender file (creating probl → collaboration among depts
(probl → collaboration - writing = collaboration.

company policy
did not allow it
writing: collaboration

FIGURE 5.4 Development of initial relations among themes

entire dataset to ensure the themes reflected the data as a whole. This inevitably involved writing and rewriting the relevant sections of my thesis in my attempt to move from description to analysis. The final stages involved drawing up provisional diagrams and renaming the themes. This is shown in Figure 5.5.

As can be seen, issues such as what counts as themes, their hierarchy, relation, and naming are all interrelated. The process of making these decisions is highly iterative as initial themes are often dropped or move up or down a category and new ones
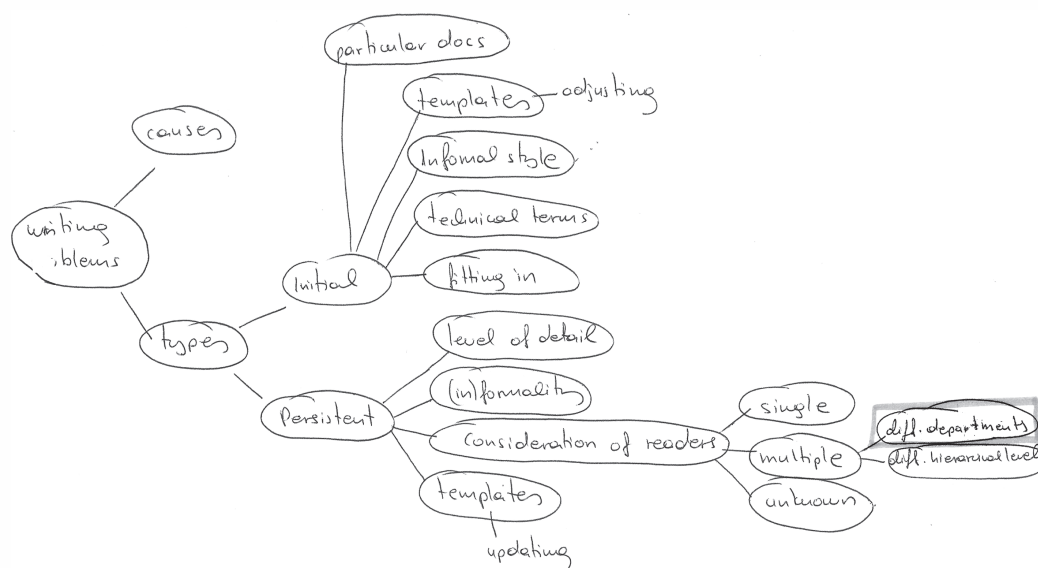
FIGURE 5.5 Provisional thematic map

emerge. The final stage involved drawing three thematic maps reflecting the corresponding three research questions, company writing practices, writing difficulties encountered, and ways of overcoming them respectively. As an example, Figure 5.6 shows the thematic map drawn on the writing problems encountered. The discussion of the findings that emerged from the semi-structured interviews was supplemented with excerpts from the interviewees' datasets. These were selected to represent the themes of the thematic analysis.

As can be seen, the distinction between initial and persistent problems in the provisional map was dropped in the final version. Instead it was expressed through the theme of "years of experience", as a factor related to a number of the writing difficulties encountered and indicated by red arrows. The new theme of "level of post", which remained latent in the previous stages as "addressing superiors" or "subordinates", surfaced acquiring greater importance and a clearer relation to the writing problems.

On the whole, the process involved substantial iteration and re-examination of the data to make sure that the whole data is reflected accurately in response to the research questions. Employing different lenses, a macro and a micro, to view the same data can reveal new themes or lead a researcher to drop existing ones. For example, the initial theme of the difficulty writing "across departments/areas of expertise" in Figure 5.1 changed to the subtheme "interdepartmental communication" under "Persisting writing problems" in Figure 5.2, remained latent/was dropped in Figure 5.3, was related to "contents clarity explicitness" in Figure 5.4, emerged as a subtheme in Figure 5.5 and emerged again as the subtheme "Different professions" in Figure 5.6 (marked in boxes in all figures). Admittedly shifting themes among different level categories, adopting and dropping new ones and relabelling them accordingly is a nuisance; it is difficult and frustrating but it is also an inevitable part of the evolving process which leads to a rewarding outcome.
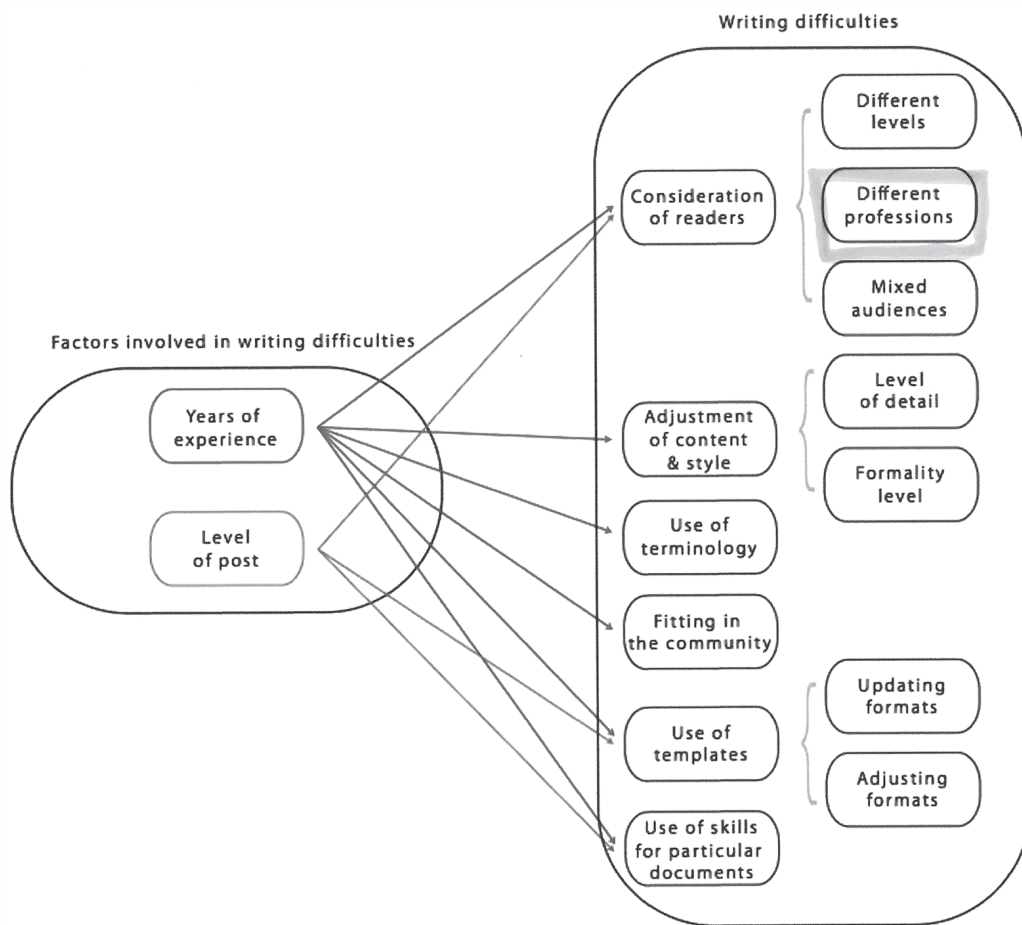
FIGURE 5.6 Final thematic map

5.14.4 Discourse-based interviews – Rationale and design of discourse-based interviews

Given the gap in literature on the definition of formality, there appears to be a need for exploring further the way formality is perceived and enacted in discourse to better understand the underlying factors behind its use. The argument is that having the participants talk about their own writing is useful in that it gives a more accurate and researcher-unbiased picture of a reality that is closer to the way it is perceived by the very people who experience it. The importance of such 'first' rather than 'second order concepts' (Angouri and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011) has been highlighted by a number of researchers of workplace discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Odell et al., 1983; Sarangi, 2002). Admittedly no analysis is completely researcher-bias free. However, given the inherent practical restrictions of conducting, analysing, and interpreting research, a mutual cooperation of researcher and participant in the research stages discussed previously proved to be very fruitful.

In the design of these interviews, my intention was to urge the informants to provide the necessary contextual information to enable me to more accurately understand the stylistic choices made in the production of the written documents.

Given that style is claimed to operate on two levels, conscious and unconscious, the assumption behind the use of discourse-based interviews is that they help elicit the informants' tacit knowledge – which allows access to the contextual information necessary for our understanding of written discourse, an important limitation of other methodologies like corpus-based studies (Odell et al., 1983; Widdowson, 2000). It becomes obvious that adopting the insider's lens rather than that of the "observer looking on" (Widdowson, 2000) can give access to contextual information that is not present in the text. Although the analysis highlights the participants' perceptions, it is also based on the discourse analysis of the data and seen in light of evidence from past literature studies on formality. In agreement with other discourse analyses utilising 'second order' concepts, the interview process was as non-directive as possible and iterative helping the participant to activate their tacit knowledge (Harwood, 2006).

Having said that, the multiple and alternating authorship and audiences of email chains posed a number of problems. Since accessing and interviewing all multiple authors was virtually impossible, I decided to seek interviews from participants who were directly involved as main writers or/and readers of the sample email chains thus acting as main informants. Seven participants volunteered to act as informants in discourse-based interviews, where they commented on the formality of the emails they were directly involved in either as writers or readers. The informants were asked to a) give their own perceptions of what constitutes formality, b) to indicate and explain instances of formal and informal language in their writing, and c) to comment on the formality and appropriacy of the overall formality of the emails and of particular linguistic items.

5.14.5 Analysis of discourse-based interviews

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. In the analysis, I initially summarised the informants' views into notes and I examined them for similarities and differences allowing for the compilation of a comprehensive list of themes on the definition of formality and appropriacy rather than a list of points of convergence. The idea behind it was that all participants' perceptions on what formality is and what is considered appropriate are equally important given that they are consistent with their linguistic choices in their writing. As Odell (1985) rightly remarks about addressing isolated alternatives (i.e., isolated linguistic choices and perceptions as opposed to common perceptions),

> although an isolated feature (e.g., form of address or elaboration) may seem insignificant, it is a sensitive indicator of a writer's complex understanding of the rhetorical context and ways for them to achieve their purpose within that context.
>
> *(p. 231)*

Upon writing, I expanded each participant's views in detail and supplemented them with quotes from their interview datasets. The quotes included in the discourse

analysis were selected to represent the themes that emerged in relation to the situational and linguistic characteristics of formality. A slight limitation was that the fact that certain interviewees were more engaged in the study than others and provided richer information and evidently that was reflected in their greater number of quotes. The thematic map that emerged in the final stage of the analysis of these interviews is shown in Figure 5.7.

5.14.6 Problems I encountered

The initial problem encountered was access. Multinational Companies are notorious for not disclosing their communication data and my study was certainly no exception. Although most participants were willing to be interviewed and recorded, they were very reluctant to show me samples of their communication. The access to the emails that I was granted was based on the relations of trust I managed to cultivate with my contacts, whom I promised anonymity and confidentiality. More difficulties involved finding the time to schedule the interviews. Evidently that meant that most meetings took place in their homes after work at the end of a very busy working day, and others were postponed and or interrupted by family or work commitments and had to be resumed later. The impact of the economic crisis was

FIGURE 5.7 Situational factors and linguistic features of formality

also felt on the willingness to contribute to the project. The daily pressure to retain their job, the insecurity caused by the multiple redundancies, and the fear of their business closing down were priorities that I had to respect and refrain from putting more pressure on them.

5.14.7 What I learned

a) The interviews provided the perfect opportunity to gain access to the written data. It is the face-to-face encounter that strengthens the honest and ethical intentions of the researcher, allows the building of trust, the development of mutual respect for one another, the joy of contributing to creativity and of helping a person in need for data. Once this relation is established, the interview meeting gains a momentum that should not be missed. Although other approaches to gaining access to data may work for other researchers and participants, for me it was the ~~climate~~ of trust in these meetings that made them successful. Admittedly, people who had known me and would vouch for me made themselves more available for interviews than others despite their very tight schedules. Although having to repeatedly adjust my schedule to their availability was frustrating at the time, I now feel it is a good lesson in flexibility and when is the right time to put more pressure or to simply let go.

b) Interviews were also the key to the insights I gained into my what I was looking for. Letting my participants first report on what they thought was important eventually played a big role in my decision to focus on formality rather than other aspects of workplace communication and linguistic features. This along with the fact that it was an under-researched and vague notion despite its high frequency of mention in research studies was the prime reason for the focus on formality. In retrospect, I now tend to feel I would never have made sense of my written data without the participants' feedback. Admittedly, I could have done the discourse analysis on my own by employing a quantitative or strictly interactional approach. Adopting a top-down approach and seeking answers to predetermined questions to make it easier had actually crossed my mind – but I would have lost what I see now as the strongest advantage – the participants' viewpoints – as I wanted what the participants thought was important to be reflected in these interviews.

c) Interview guiding principles studied in books about how to conduct research acquire even greater practical significance. Although I was well aware that there is no one-off interview, calling and meeting my informants repeatedly to ask for clarifications was the only way. The interview reports were reread multiple times, and the emergent themes were rearranged repeatedly before arriving at their final form. Far from linear, the process could be nothing but recursive and cyclical. Taking it a bit further, far from linear, it was an organic process that calls for alertness and flexibility.

d) Letting go and giving the participants control over the collection process was more demanding than I originally thought it would be. The approach of giving them full control – the 'you can give me whatever written documents you feel

comfortable sharing' approach – together with my not knowing what to focus on at that stage led to the collection of written data that weren't used in the project and the loss of what I felt was valuable time. Once the focus on formality and emails was made clear to my mind, my requirements became clearer and the collection of data was facilitated and accelerated. During the interviews I also realised that some of my initial hunches/subjective intuitions about the formality used in the emails were not consistent with the interviewee reports. Realising my own judgments as a researcher and respecting my participants' views in times of disagreement was an absolute must and a challenge for me as a new researcher.

A few years later, in my viva, I was asked what I would have done differently if I had the chance. The answer still is I wouldn't change a thing. I now realise it was because I had to let go of some of the researcher's control and acquired an ear for their voices. I learned how to be more patient, flexible, and receptive to views where the researcher may think has the major role. For a new researcher to grow, one needs to be honestly open to a process that is far from linear; it is as organic as life itself.

The project was organic – all choices/decisions were an interaction/combination of what they thought was important and what I thought was important. And I realise now how indebted I am to my participants for inviting me to their homes after work during their very precious personal time.

Mahili, June, 2017

Note

1 I am not addressing ethics here for space reasons, but see the BAAL recommendations on good practice and relevant literature: https: //baalweb.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/goodpractice_full_2016.pdf

PART III

Doing culture and identity in workplace interaction[1]

When we look into how people do 'culture in the workplace' we look into how people do organisational practices in their specific organisational setting. The matrix of language and power and politics is immediately relevant to this process as already discussed. Following from the discussion of key concepts (Chapters 2 and 3), my interest here is to take a closer look at what people do at work interactionally and how this shapes and is shaped by the organisational context. In this part I tease out further the concept of 'doing' and I specifically focus on the relationship between culture and identity as situated work practices.

I discuss the case of three organisations, all of which fall in the ~~SME~~ category and are in transition. Transitions are particularly interesting times in organisations as they mark visible shifts from the taken for granted to new forms and ways of doing. The tacit is made explicit and renegotiated in the process of setting a new normality. The quality of access and relationship with the participants allowed for rich data to be collected. I explore the significance of this in the two chapters of this section. The first chapter is concerned with metacultural discourse and the function of narratives of difference while the second addresses theoretical issues relevant to meeting talk, which is the core business event I am interested in, and draws on data from three SMEs.

Note

1 The reader will notice a change in style from Part 2. This is intentional and the text resumes a less direct tone. Part 3 aims to apply theory (Part 1) to practice and, through the analysis of data, illustrates issues raised in Part 2.

6

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE REVISITED

Current workplace discourse studies approach identity as situated, fluid, and dynamic. This approach, influenced by social constructionism, has provided conceptual tools to look into the different layers of identity work, involving both the situated interactional order as well as the interrelationship with societal, political, and historical contexts (Chapter 2). Seeing identity as a 'construct' brings individual agency to the fore and it also implies equality in (self/other) identity ascription. Assuming equality, however, is problematic as the process of negotiating un/marked identities (see also Kirilova and Angouri, 2017 on the Goffmanian stigma) depends on local asymmetries and has immediate tangible and situated consequences.

For instance, in recent work with collaborator Kirilova (e.g., Kirilova and Angouri, 2017) we discussed how identities of difference are associated with unbelongingness (see S Hall, 1995 on ideology of belongingness) and are projected upon candidates in a job interview context – determining success or the opposite. This is well shown in studies focusing on the 'linguistic penalty' (Roberts and Campbell, 2006; Piller, 2016), the price migrants pay for not indexing belonging to the group using the normative signifiers in a workplace setting. Resisting dominant discourses and positioning 'self' as different depends greatly on the power imbalance in the encounter and the social order. This points to the ongoing debate between structure and agency and the need to look into the ways in which our theoretical tools capture the dynamic process of meaning negotiation (see Part 2). The micro/macro duality is at the heart of the different traditions, debating the individual work at a 'micro' level and in relation to a bigger societal 'macro' context (cf. DA traditions, see Chapter 4). The micro/macro analytical artefact, however, brings to the fore the challenges we as analysts face in unpacking the complexities of the lived experience. 'People' do not think or act in micro/macro terms. To the contrary, the moment of talk perpetuates or challenges preexisting structures and, simultaneously, these structures provide the context within which situated interaction takes place.

This is a political process, as I argued earlier, and by political I refer to the ways in which "power, status, value or worth" are distributed (Gee, 2006: 2).

The politics of difference are particularly visible in the 'cultural identity' construct. Cultural identity is a compound term widely used in academia and everyday life. It is often used to index 'national culture' in some guise or to refer to a collective identity. I have discussed the core concepts, and their abstract nature, in the first part of the book. Building on that, cultural identity is often used to explain or justify 'difference'. Explaining away difference, however, is analytically limiting and points to the theoretical standpoint of the researcher more than the analytical power of the core terms themselves. Depending on where the researcher stands on the positivist–postmodernist spectrum, the terms can be used to index (more or less stable) characteristics shared by groups of people categorised as having at least a minimal set of common identifiers. Despite the fact that the concept of homogeneity and top-down categorisation carries inherent limitations (see Chapter 2), it is important to note that cultural identity narratives are ubiquitous in everyday discourses. These discourses can be best approached from a critical angle according to which culture and identity – as well as cultural identity – are "part of action and interaction" (Campbell and Roberts, 2007: 247). What is significant then is how discourses of cultural difference or essentialist meanings of culture more broadly are mobilised in discourse generally or business events in our case.

Cultural identity discourses enable people to position self and other. As S Hall argues (1990: 226): "Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning". This positioning heavily draws on the concept of difference. In any online search for 'culture', what comes up first is representations of people from different ethnic backgrounds or flags associated with different nations or representations of 'culture shock' (see Section 2.2). The deeply rooted view of cultural difference, which draws on powerful myths of (national) homogeneity and ideals of sameness, is central in understanding the prevalence of narratives of the 'other'.

Difference has been discussed in relation to most approaches to identity; typically understood as the flip side of sameness which provides the space for negotiating the 'I' vs. 'They' and equally 'Us' vs. 'Them' positions. Bucholtz and Hall in their recent work (2005) write on the dynamics of similarity and difference and their role in negotiating in/exclusion in interaction. As both Appadurai (1993) and Halley (2001) have argued it is through constructing difference that cultural discourses become a resource for constructing identity. Difference is political.

Cultural identity can, then, be usefully approached through a *politics of difference* angle. The 'politics of difference' term denotes processes of constructing the 'other' by drawing (conceptual and *symbolic*) boundaries between us/them. From this point of view, the politics of difference meet the *politics of belonging*: "the dirty work of boundary maintenance" (Crowley, 1999: 30). Evidently the boundary is not geographical or literal but serves as a metaphor to denote the struggle over in/ exclusion. S Hall (1996a,b) refers to processes of identification as processes of articulation of similarity and difference. The politics of difference or non/belonging

invite attention to the processes of in/exclusion that take place in either the macro politics (P-politics) or national level politics as well as everyday political discourse (p-politics – see 2.7 and endnote ii). Cultural identity, which comes with strong connotations of unity, is a powerful tool for constructing a team identity in the workplace or to explain practices that may or not be seen as appropriate from the speaker's perspective and so forth.

Cultural identity, in an organisational setting, constitutes a *powerful resource for evaluating-justifying or resisting existing structure and practices in the interests of particular group/s*. In their turn, discourses of cultural difference contribute to *standardising/ changing* practice, which, then, feeds into dominant ideologies visible to the members of a workplace. Discourses of cultural difference, in any guise, are extraordinarily tenacious and provide powerful tools for self/other positioning and gatekeeping. Standardisation draws on a complex set of processes, related to *historicity and imaginary*, feeding into dominant beliefs which are internalised and reproduced in artefacts – e.g., value statements and narratives of 'organisational culture' – as well everyday practice. At the same time, members of any organisation reinforce or scrutinise the status quo – including norms and practices and individual perspectives of what is accepted/appropriate/allowed/sanctioned and so on in daily life at work.

In the following section I turn to data which are almost emblematic of 'Us'/'Them' positions.

6.1 Metacultural discourse as a resource

Treating intercultural communication as 'special' and different to other instances of interaction, as well put by Verschueren (2008: 23), depends on the researcher's ideological position and agenda as well as disciplinary loyalties. Culture is, however, treated in a 'special' way in both first and second order narratives and spaces where professionals are invited to provide accounts on their practices, as in research interviews or regular business events, such as a meeting.

Metacultural discourse can take the form of culturalism, a representation of the 'other' on the basis of characteristics associated with national groups (see also culturism in Holliday et al., 2010; Holliday, 2011), but I also use the term to refer to ideal representations of the ingroup as well as narratives of collective practice. Culturalism – as with other 'isms' is negatively marked. This is aligned with a particular ideological position which critical sociolinguists (may) embrace. At the same time using a broader term that allows the analyst to open a dialogue about the ways in which essentialist meanings of culture are mobilised can provide a tool to explore a wider range of phenomena under its umbrella.

The excerpts below (6.1–6.4) represent a common pattern particularly in interviews in business contexts. When nationality is topicalised, it is associated with specific behaviours and ways of doing which are then contrasted with other groups which are represented as more or less similar or different. These narratives are common and have fed into models and taxonomies of culture that have been and still are popular generally and in the business world in particular. This *meta*-talk, which is often elicited by the researcher, provides a convenient source of data but it does

not happen in a vacuum. The process of attributing characteristics to groups takes a particular meaning in the context where it is mobilised.

Let us consider one example, in an excerpt, one of our speakers, who self-identifies as German, claims an ideal of efficiency which is achieved in and through aligning two national groups. There is nothing inherent, nomothetic, or rather nomotelic (deterministic) in the process of attributing characteristics or behaviours, they are "percepts of each individual" (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985: 116) or group. Through this process the interviewee aligns with a group with which she used to work at the time of the interview and indirectly criticises the (other) majority group by excluding them from the 'efficiency' category. Metacultural discourse is a useful resource in claiming specific characteristics associated with ideals of 'good' or 'bad' business. For instance in this excerpt, efficiency and optimization emerge, both correspond to strong ideals of good business practice in the modern workplace.

Excerpt 6.1   Interview with a senior manager in a multinational advertising company. The language of the interview in English.

1   I believe German and Japanese people think alike we're all very very
2   (.) focused on efficiency and optimisation

For anybody who has carried out research in the workplace, similar narratives are all too familiar. One can substitute reference to 'German' with any national group without changing much their form or function. The cultural other, be it on ethnic, gender, age grounds, is foregrounded in narratives of difference. This is also very common in the projects I supervised over the years (see e.g., Mahili, 2014; Kim, forthcoming; Efthymiadou, forthcoming). Taking these accounts at face value or dismissing them does not do justice to the complexity of the matter. So why essentialise the 'other'? Otherisation and discourses of difference provide a rich resource for multiple practices – claiming a team identity, ascertain dis/agreement with established practices and ways of doing, resisting authority, and so on – the list is endless. In the political and ideological realm of any workplace setting, discourses of difference constitute a resource that often remains unquestioned and resistant to alternative narratives.

The following narrative allows more detailed analysis. The data are drawn from a multinational construction company where the interviewee, pseudonymed here Sarah, occupies a senior position in her department and she is in middle management according to the company's flowchart. The activities of the company are not relevant here. Sarah is prompted, by me, to expand on 'culture shock' a

termed she used earlier in the data collection process. This in itself is interesting and shows the interplay between first and second order terminology and the impact a particular line of ICC enquiry has had on the ways culture is talked about in business settings. I discuss five excerpts which are highlighted in the text as an illustration of how Sarah constructs her professional identity and mobilises discourses of cultural difference in the process. I have deliberately included some of the interactional context to allow the reader to develop a feel for the text. The data were first thematically organised and then analysed in detail from an inter-actional sociolinguistic perspective. Culture as nationality is mobilised in relation to ideals of performance throughout. National labels are given explanatory power and are associated with ways of doing business in general and running meetings in particular. Excerpt 6.2 is taken from the early part of our conversation.

Excerpt 6.2   Interview with a manager in a senior role in a multinational construction company. The language of the interview in English. The excerpt is taking from the opening part of a discussion on culture shock.

1	J	I've noticed that you referred to *culture shock* (. . .)
2		could you please give me some more details↑
3	S	yeah sure yeah
4	J	mmhm
5	S	**yeah that was a little bit, that was a little bit (.)**
6		**that was a little bit difficult in the beginning (.) yeah**
7		**a little bit different but I think (.) it was totally**
8		**different to what I am used to in ((names countries)) (.)**
9		**and ((names countries)) (.) emh I found it easy enough**
10		**though (.) I just fit easily anywhere I'm born (.) I am**
11		**a comedian ((laughing)) I was picking up the language**
12		**very easily. I enjoyed that and the more you pick up the**
13		**language the better you use I mean (.) you also get into**
14		**the mind set (.) so it didn't frustrate me as much as it**
15		**would someone who know a little bit of XXXX ((the**
16		**country's language)) and who is trying to think only in**
17		**English (.)** so I didn't mind that I learned the trick as
18		far as I got along so I fit quite easily but I can still
19		stand back sometimes and see the difference between the
20		two you know (.) I think it will sound ridiculous
21		((laughing)) but that's all the fun of living here you
22		can't expect (.)
23		[. . .]

The relationship between language, thinking, and culture is a recurrent theme in the narrative and Sarah puts forward an equation between knowing the language and accessing the norms of a 'culture'. This is particularly clear in the first excerpt (lines 5–16). Sarah excludes herself from cultural difficulties and makes a connection between language skills and cultural competence. The constant repetition of 'I' and the 'easy fitting in' (e.g., lines 10, 11, 20) contribute to her claiming a range of skills in operating across languages and geographical localities in the context of claiming her professional identity. The 'easy fit' discourse is enacted through reference to abilities (from birth, e.g., picking up language), attributes, and reflexivity (e.g., I can stand back and observe). The repetition in the opening lines of 'little difficult' which emphasises the difficulty level and naming of countries both contribute to Sarah's professional identity and her constructed cosmopolitan professional persona which adapts well and fast despite differences. Once this position is established, Sarah moves on to introduce the other actors. This involves a manager sent by the headquarters (under the label 'American lady') and the local CEO. The two excerpts (in excerpt 6.3, lines 5–30 and 39–46) constitute the heart of Sarah's narrative, the main incident, the 'American lady'.

Excerpt 6.3   Interview with a manager in a senior role in a multinational construction company. The language of the interview in English. The two highlighted parts constitute the heart of the narrative ~~and an account on the influence of nationality on business practice.~~

1	S–	a meeting something where we have ((refers to
2		colleagues)) from a company with ((colleagues from
3		subsidiary from another country)) and to me it was a very
4		normal meeting and the person was carrying the meeting
5		and ((gives name)) **an [American] lady was giving comments**
6		**but it is also that she was critical of this ((refers to**
7		**colleague)) guy and how he handled certain situations in**
8		**sales and he lost a sale (.) and he absolutely erupted**
9		**and she didn't even mean nothing he went completely crazy**
10		**he took it as a personal insult and he went absolutely**
11		**(.) and we watched all that meeting and oh (.) if it was**
12		**me and she was giving me this comments she would have**
13		**done the same but I would take it nicely he took it like**
14		**a (.) I don't know (.) personal insult and that was due**
15		**to cultural difference I think hmh (.) and that sometimes**
16		**makes it very very difficult for her later how to have**
17		**meetings with the stuff (.) she used to call ((gives names**

18		of colleagues)) primitive elements (.) but it was she
19		didn't understand either because she was American living
20		with ((refers to nationalities of colleagues and
21		countries)) and she was trying to understand he took it
22		the wrong way and he was translating directly from English
23		he wasn't taking it that this was [. . .](.) wait a minute
24		how do you call it (.) she was making (.) (.) its like
25		a like a review of his performance it wasn't into the
26		criticism of his work (.) hmm yeah exactly that's it (.)
27		everything is personal (.) but it created a friction
28		because he was seeing the prima donna that came to show
29		business here and you know (.) and I was like ok now calm
30		down (.) and that actually caused problems concerning
31		losing sales to gaining sales to the point that they
32		didn't take personally but they contributed personal
33		business but it wasn't it was a review on how to get the
34		best out (.) the best out of a market↓
35	S–	can I go on about this↑
36	J–	of course
37	S–	do you have the time to spare↑
38	J–	of course of course don't worry
39	S–	ok what I mean is that for example in ((refers to two
40		countries)) now business is business you leave your
41		personal matters outside the door when you come in here(.)
42		if it is good criticism (.) it's very important in a
43		working environment. it is useful (.) it is useful if you
44		understand (.) realise that this is to help me as well
45		you know to learn of course its learning it's a learning
46		experience↓

This part of the narrative comes as an explanation of a meeting that did not go well which is attributed to a cultural clash in ways doing/receiving criticism. Sarah's account positions the subsidiary manager as giving critical but fair comments, while the local manager's uptake is negatively evaluated given that ('he erupted', 'went completely crazy'). National labels are recurrent and associated with failed com-munication. 'Cultural difference' (e.g., lines 15–16, 19) is named and blamed and although the headquarters manager enjoys Sarah's approval as also evident in the rest of the text, she also 'didn't understand' (line 19). Despite this, Sarah's negative evaluation of the current local management is evident from her suggestion that the HQ manager was resisted as a 'prima donna' (line 28) while the local manager did not engage and this resulted in losing sales (lines 30 ff.). The rest of the text moves on to build a criticism of current management mainly in relation to the daily

running of the business. The structure of this story on the binary 'she said–he said' contributes to the pace of the narrative and the building of the two central actors. The alignment with the female manager is enacted both directly by disaligning with the male character (e.g., conditional 'if it was me' 'I would have acted differently' is significant here) as well as attribute good business practice to her ways of doing. This is further developed in the lines 39 onwards. This third excerpt puts forward a set of ideals that provide further substantiation to Sarah's support for the 'American' manager and allow her to construct her own professional identity as a responsible and 'good manager'. Reference to countries provide the tools for Sarah to distance herself ~~for~~ the critique of the current senior management which fails to observe dominant ideals such as 'leaving personal matters outside the door' (lines 31–32 and onwards) – note also 'business is business' (line 40), 'learning on the job' (lines 45–46). Sarah's reference to management training provides further authority to the claims (line 44) and allows her to ascertain her seniority in the organisation.

Sarah's account of 'good' work practice perpetuates the ideals of the modern workplace we discussed earlier.

This is further elaborated in the following two excerpts (in excerpt 6.4, lines 1–15 and 17–36).

Excerpt 6.4   Interview with a manager in a senior role in a multinational construction company. The language of the interview in English. The last two highlighted excerpts illustrate the ways in which powerful business ideals are enacted in the construction of professional identities.

1	[. . .] **that's (.) number one waste of time (.) they ~~dont~~**
2	**manage the resources properly they ~~dont~~ do proper meetings**
3	**and proper get togethers in the morning but they have big**
4	**meetings once a week and that's a waste of time because**
5	**everybody is shouting to everybody (.) there is so much**
6	**time wasted↓ they don't manage their time properly or ehm (.)**
7	**how can I put it (.)and its something (.) this American**
8	**woman ((gives name)) talking she was very very strong and**
9	**even teaching you and slowly slowly she turned it into a**
10	**proper meeting get together every morning↓ agenda for the**
11	**day follow-up the following morning and finally it was**
12	**quick it was this this and this ok you want something else**
13	**good ok↓ once every month we had a big meeting to discuss**
14	**something (.)some mistakes where we are going wrong (.)**
15	**bring up ideas** (.) this once a week four five hour
16	meetings, meetings late at night and just keeping them

17		down there it's a **waste of time** as far as I can see **I mean**
18		**we all want to be quick (.) we all work for the same job**
19		**we are all ((refers to teams in the company)) working**
20		**together why can't we just get together and say look guys**
21		**we will get together every morning and say (.) ok this is**
22		**our plan for today (.) ok let's go out and do it and if we**
23		**need to convene an urgent meeting for an emergency we will**
24		**do (.) there is no problem we all have time but this is**
25		**all (.) all not ((refers to the company)) at all and I'm**
26		**sorry to say that finally the left hand doesn't know what**
27		**the right hand is doing and that's all (.) and because**
28		**there is no proper management it drowns all the staff to**
29		**this indiscretion and its stressful (.) its really**
30		**stressful I'm sorry if I sound bitchy but (.) and of course**
31		**its causing great confusion (.) you also find they find**
32		**that there is no plan because they don't get together on**
33		**a daily basis thus there will be confusion misdirection**
34		**(.) ten people going the same direction doing the same**
35		**things and it's a waste of time because one person should**
36		**be responsible for each particular issue (.)** so I would
37		have changed from people asking what is happening with
38		what is happening with that over to I have told ((refers
39		to colleagues)) about this so why are you asking me the
40		same (.) it's too much people involved because there is no
41		proper line of communication↓ there is lack of structure
42		and its so hard and that is why there are so many people **stretched** here and there [. . .]
43	S–	((laughter))

In the first part, the repetition of wasting time/time wasted in the same turn works as an intensifier of Sarah's argument and the position she foregrounds. The Headquarters' manager is again brought in the narrative by her national label. This time however it is the management style that is relevant and her ability to shift local practice to a form that suits better Sarah's ideals. These ideals are evidently also related to political alliances in the workplace, Sarah's narrative constructs a senior management that is wasting resources, leads to confusion, lacks communication lines, and does not make good use of its senior personnel so people end up 'stretched' (line 42). Having framed this account on the basis of the 'cultural' has allowed Sarah to distance herself from a direct attack and make a successful act of resistance on the basis of good business practice. Note the recycling of 'waste of time' as well as the building up of the 'lack of structure'. Through promoting a collective identity – the use of 'we' is telling here, and direct enactment of one

collective identity under the same ideals 'we all want to be quick', Sarah put forward her proposal for morning meetings for middle managers which the then senior management had decided to not pursue (see DesignCo for the introduction of a similar process – Chapter 8). The negative criticism, built through and in the comparison with the 'American' lady, has successfully given Sarah a way to scrutinise current practice on multiple levels while also distancing herself from the act.

To conclude, Sarah is successfully providing a critical account of the current management by juxtaposing what good practice looks like (e.g., in excerpt 6.3, lines 39 ff.) vs. current practice in the organisation (lines 3 ff.), what good managers (e.g., lines 10 ff.) do vs. current management (e.g., lines 25 ff.), and indicators of failure, notably wasting time and causing confusion. Culturalism works in very similar ways to cultural as national/ethnic stereotypes (Section 2.12) in the attribution of group characteristics. Stereotypes are part of a process that contributes to the "maintenance of social and symbolic order" (S. Hall, 1997: 257) and sets the boundaries between the way we do things, and by extension the way things should be done, and the praxis of the 'other'. Stereotyping tends to co-occur with power imbalance (S. Hall, 1997) and the workplace is a prime site for negotiations of whose way is the 'right way'. Sarah's text is a very good example of metacultural discourse patterns where cultural identity is evoked and locally situated in the process of positioning self and other in the interview space.

Stereotyping is the glue that brings together difference, representation, and power (see the work of postcolonial scholars Said or Spivak amongst others). Constructions of 'culture', 'gender', 'race' – and ensuing us/them dualism – reinstate the authority and become essential tools for maintaining situated hegemonies. This becomes particularly visible when 'problems' arise in a workplace context. I turn to this in the light of the meeting data in the next chapter.

Narratives of difference are everywhere around us in professional and social domains. Popular media and humorous representations of the other feed into the hegemony of difference which, in its turn, is re-enacted in different domains of social activity including, of course, the workplace. This in its turn becomes part of the discourses available and visible in a workplace setting and which are mobilised in relation to specific practices and ways of doing. This is particularly apparent in the way groups of employees negotiate roles and responsibilities and the organisation also emerges in the process.

Methodologically, a critical IS approach allows for taken-for-granted assumptions and dominant ideologies to be captured by our conceptual apparatus and links the first order narratives to second order theoretical interpretations. From this point of view, looking into interactional practice allows a better understanding of the why/how of the narratives of difference and how they are mobilised to *legitimise* a position or action. The reification and reproduction of difference discourse is central to its morphing into a set of values which conceals the *processes* of construction

and becomes the powerful 'common sense'. Looking closely into the organisation and drawing on multiple data sources allows the researcher to interpret the here and now of talk in relation to the institutional order and imaginaries of performance that employees negotiate in their daily routines at work. I elaborate on this further in Chapter 7.

7

GROUP IDENTITY, TEAMWORK, AND MEETING TALK

Working in groups and teams is common in the workplace and membership of these formations also comes with an awareness of ways of doing and ways of being. My focus is in professional identity and the ways in which the organisation's ways of doing are locally negotiated. I start by providing a brief discussion on teamwork as it is a common form of organisation of business activity and prominent in work-place discourse, ICC, and relevant business literature.

In many workplaces, teams are the main opus operandi because of the very nature of work-related complex problems, which often require the contribution of multi-professional teams and encourage the crossing of professional boundaries (Kerosuo and Engestrom, 2003). Although teams are described as autonomous and self-managed, both qualities associated with positive outcomes in terms of per-formance indicators (e.g., von Bonsdorff et al., 2015), the actual meaning of these terms needs to be placed within the political context of the workplace. In this context, teams can also provide a control mechanism which are in line with the neoliberal work order (see Chapter 3) and allow for a leaner flowchart where the employees share gatekeeping roles and enforce ways of doing and alignment with the company's direction of travel. Hence, looking into the work of teams provides an insight into the ways organisations in the abstract and shared systems of meaning more specifically are negotiated.

Framing the team however is not straightforward and a number of attempts have been made to capture the defining elements that distinguish a team from other formations (e.g., Baker et al., 2006). Taxonomies (e.g., Salas et al., 2005) are popular particularly in health and business and common denominators include: common goal, leadership, trust, adaptability. Team communication is often part of this matrix, but it is also not uncommon for communication to be considered separate to the 'work' of the team. These taxonomies are then used to develop metrics for team performance (e.g., Shapiro et al., 2008). Team communication is often based on

taxonomies, which derive from work in Crew Resource Management (CRM), and aim to provide the foundation for standardised training curricula that will lead to enhanced performance and efficiency. Undoubtedly assessing and enhancing teamwork is critical. For instance, teamwork training has been suggested as one of the main priorities in health care training. However these metrics used to evaluate teamwork performance often rely on self-assessments by staff or generic scoring systems that fail to capture the dynamic and complex range of factors that interact and interplay in actual team performance.

A team is often understood as

> a collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and are seen by others as an intact social entity embedded in one or more larger social systems, and who manage their relationship across organisational boundaries
>
> *(Cohen and Bailey, 1997: 241)*

Although this is one of the many definitions and a rather old one, it is still widely used in different disciplinary fields (e.g., Drescher et al., 2014; Morgan et al., 2015). It is useful in drawing attention to the team as distinct entity and foregrounds the importance of managing relationships. The concept of *distinctiveness* is particularly important and a factor that distinguishes between the different formations in workplace settings. Teams are often assembled around a project either through direct assignment or open recruitment. Other formations, which may be based on voluntary participation and not necessarily share a particular life cycle of activities, will go through a different life trajectory and pressures to perform against specific indicators. This affects the negotiation of positions available *to* the members and the expectations/ideals of performance that are negotiated *between* the members. The current understanding of teamwork is also that teams provide with expertise, problem solving, and decision making potential that go beyond the skills and competencies of any one individual (Siassakos et al., 2011 for a discussion as well as in reading for wider audiences e.g., De Rond, 2012). Moving far from a linear and static model of the past where group formation was seen as going through a staged process (see e.g., Tuckman's 1965 famous 'forming, storming, norming, performing' model) and where the outcome of a team's work was conceived and measured through an input-process-output (I-P-O) model, modern approaches understand teamwork as dynamic and place emphasis on the interaction between stages of teamwork as well as the management of relationships (see e.g., from emergency medicine Fernandez et al., 2008).

Research on teams and teamwork is not 'owned' by any one discipline and despite debates around definitions and analytical tools, there is agreement that teamwork is not the aggregate of the skills and competences of the individual members. In an influential work, Salas et al. (2005) refers to five core characteristics of teamwork which include *Team leadership, Mutual performance monitoring, Back-up behaviour, Adaptability,* and *Team orientation.* Salas writes from an (organisational)

psychology background, which is important in order to place the terms and ori-entation to measurement in its disciplinary context. The terms themselves or the taxonomy is not of interest here (see e.g., Salas et al., 2008). However the role of the team in both endorsing/sanctioning self/other behaviour and performance, and the emphasis on communication as a process and reference to 'acceptable interac-tion patterns', also matches the issues raised by workplace discourse analysts.

I see teams as denoting a different formation to a group which I take to be a broader concept and which then becomes analytically less salient. I would argue however that whether we call a formation a group or a team is by and large a mat-ter of definition and my interest is on how people negotiate meaning between the 'we/I' positions and not the terminology per se. I understand teams as *dynamic and complex systems* as well as a specific *mechanism* in the modern workplace, and par-ticularly the corporate workplace, for providing with flexibility to manage change and to be able to quickly adapt to the changing socioeconomic environment. The need for flexibility is reflected in the structure of the modern workplace, its geo-graphical distribution for a global reach and multi skilled/multi-professional teams for enhancing the remit of work teams can produce (see e.g., Holman et al., 2003). Teams however also provide stability by both the relational history of the members, the artefacts the members have produced, and the contribution of the team's work to organisational knowledge.

For the purposes of this chapter, I consider a team to be *a group of people that has worked together for a period of time and is perceived to be a team by its members. It has developed language practices, more or less shared between the members that make the team vis-ible to the members and is seen as a separate entity to other teams in the same work environ-ment.* The team's interactional style includes what is appropriate or unmarked. This includes the whole range of linguistic resources (including for instance formality levels, specialised vocabulary, or use of language varieties the members share and so on). Teams share resources and knowledge capital in order to achieve set tasks and goals. The process of sharing though is not a simple aggregation, it involves the team members managing capital (in Bourdieu's sense) in the web of professional and social relationships within which the members operate.

Work by conversation analysts has shown how teams are formed in interaction through a process of dis/alignment and change in the positions the members take, moving from an individual position to the status of a "single interactional party" (Djordjilovic, 2012: 123). This involves the members of the team working together in accomplishing the act of being a team. Although interactional teams constitute a different unit of analysis to a named team, the latter needs to emerge through the former; a team will emerge through talking itself into being. This does not only involve the management of the sequential architecture of an encounter but also the "shared authorship of an action" (Djordjilovic, 2012: 123) as well as accountability and ratification of positions claimed by team members. In the workplace context, displays of authority are a core part of claiming expertise. Expertise is particularly relevant to constructing a professional self as well as to claiming a position in a team on the basis of epistemic authority. The members of a team are accountable

to each other and as such they negotiate positions where there is convergence or divergence as part of an ongoing practice at work. Interactional features such as the use of collective person reference, an 'institutional we' has been widely studied in workplace interaction (see e.g., Drew and Heritage, 1992). Interactional coordination is particularly interesting as it also involves negotiations of power employees' roles and responsibilities that are associated with. This becomes visible in iconic team processes such as decision mMaking and problem solving.

In the team construct, interactants negotiate individual/collective displays depending on their role, what the topic is, relationships in situ, and so on. Markaki and Mondada (2012) show how identities are claimed and projected locally in relation to the work of the meeting, the participants and common orientation. In their work they show how national categories are made relevant in a multinational meeting and associated with roles and policies of the different departments in a company.

Workplace teams are not isolated and employees belong to a number of teams simultaneously. Moving in or between teams in the workplace involves negotiating norms and ways of doing that are visible to the group. This is directly relevant to claiming and being accepted (or not) as 'one of us'. Practices, including linguistic practices, circulate and influence each other. These repertoires form part of the knowledge employees have about their work context. Becoming part of a team is subject to the individual claiming membership and the team projecting member status to the newcomer and this process is related to a negotiation of power between the established and new members of the team (Angouri, 2015). Claiming a position in this group depends very much on mobilising the language that allows one to position oneself within the group's boundaries. Critical discourse analysts (Krzyżanowski and Wodak, 2008) have argued on the fluid and dynamic ways of constructing boundaries and enacting an 'Us/Them' dichotomy, impacting the formation of in- and out-groups. Interaction in these contexts emerges as a key site in which boundary-crossing takes place and boundary-shifting of the socio-political environment is talked into being (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984). As noted by Krzyzanowski and Wodak (2008), "discourses of belonging manifest processes of identifying as desired members of a community or as its unwanted aliens" (p. 101).

Being 'one of us' indexes an attachment with the team. The same processes can be referred to by terms such as ~~group~~ and Community of Practice (see Section 2.7) depending on preferred use of terminology and theoretical frameworks. The important common ground is that in order to claim membership, interactants negotiate and align with what indexes participation to the specific formation. Fitting in implies a process of accommodation which however is not equally shared between the members. The newcomers to a team are typically expected to negotiate their way in the team depending on their role and position as well as the micro politics of their immediate setting (on belonging and fitting in, see Angouri and Kirilova, 2017).

Although teams come together both in task-oriented events as well as social gatherings, the data discussed later are drawn from meetings. The meeting event provides a prototypical space for the negotiation of professional roles and practices

and a context for indexing belonging (or otherwise) to the team. It is also the context for the negotiation of identities and ways of doing. I discuss this further in the next section.

7.1 Meetings at work

Meetings have been and are becoming even more 'the stuff of work'. In 1995, in an influential publication on sense making in organisations (see also 1979), Weick writes in response to ambiguity in the workplace that "people need to meet more often" (1995: 185). And it is indeed the case that the number of meetings in any organisation is high and still growing (Rogelberg et al., 2007). Although what 'counts' as a meeting varies depending on the context and organisation, the numbers suggested in relevant studies are typically impressive. For instance Allen et al. (2015) refer to over 25 million meetings/day in the US alone (2015: 3), while Mintzberg in the classic 1973 text argues that on average 59% of managers' time goes to meetings. Irrespective of the accuracy of these numbers, meetings undoubtedly are everywhere.

They constitute a privileged event, frequent in any workplace, and provide the context for negotiating and jointly constructing roles and responsibilities, relationships, and practices: in short, ways of 'doing'. Their significance and role was noted quite a while ago; Schwartzman (1989) and Mumby's (1988) publications are widely known as well as the highly significant for workplace interaction analysts Boden (1994) and Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997), amongst others. Already thirty years ago meeting outcomes (broadly put) were argued to go beyond the total sum of the skills and capacities or, very importantly, intentions of the individual participants. Arguably meetings carry agency in constructing the organisation; Boden, for instance, argues that meetings "play an oddly central role in the accomplishment of the organisation" (1994: 82), while Weick had already noted their role in "making [the organisation] visible" (Weick, 1979: 133–134 in Schwartzman, 2013: 9). Meetings are prime contexts for studying structure and agency or the negotiation of the participants' habitus a la Bourdieu. Practices come under scrutiny and are sanctioned or legitimised. I find the game metaphor (see Bourdieu, 1990; Casanave, 2002) useful in describing the work that participants do in the meeting context. Each individual participates on the basis of a prior understanding of the 'rules' of the game (the structures and norms in place) but the way each one of us plays the game allows space for individuating the status quo – within the possibilities and constraints available depending on the specific context.

Meetings are prime spaces for that, and although they take different shapes and forms, their function in knowledge production, information sharing, power negotiation is consistently reported in all relevant studies. Going back to Boden, she has succinctly argued that meetings constitute 'symbolic affairs' which involve both the ritualistic character of their structure but also because of their role in ratifying work-related practices and processes. Meetings have been studied from a range of

linguistic and non-linguistic perspectives, workplace sociolinguistics have focused on the interaction and looked into problem solving, decision making, and role and identity negotiation. CDA analysts have also been attracted to the power negotiation and ab/use in the meeting event and the ways in which the control is exercised, resisted, and challenged.

Evidently, the study of meetings has been confronted with common challenges which all methodologies have had to address (see Angouri and Mondada, 2017). Common challenges occur while doing fieldwork and gathering data of different sorts (such as written documents, emails exchanges, webpages, situated talk, elicited declarations) from contexts in which there are issues of confidentiality, hierarchy, and competition. Getting authorisation to collect documents, to interview people, or to record actual meetings is often difficult, and may be constrained and restricted by confidential contents but also by delicate hierarchical relationships (see also Chapter 4). This has an impact on what is possible for the workplace analyst and also explains why certain types of meetings have been studied more than others, e.g., institutions have been studied more than companies, medium/large enterprises have been studied more than smaller ones; white collars more than blue collars and so on.

7.1.1 But what counts as a meeting?

Tannen (1994: 277) has identified meetings as the microcosm of an organisation's communication. In the same vein, Johnson (1990: 318, cited in Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997: 29) states that meetings are "probably the prototypical form of multiparty communication". The importance of *meetings* in the modern workplace is commonly agreed on among researchers studying the workplace from any perspective even though the discourse of meetings is still relatively under-researched from a critical, sociolinguistic perspective.

The very definition of what constitutes a 'meeting' seems to be highly problematic. Cuff and Sharrock (1985: 158) provide arguably the most flexible reading of business meetings as they suggest that the participants can "commonsensically" recognise a meeting in their organisational context. Their definition, however, has come under scrutiny for being too broad to be analytically useful. Although this is a valid concern, the concept of 'common sense' is significant as it highlights the importance of first order understandings of the event, in relation to both its form and function.

Schwartzman (1989: 7) defines meetings as a

> communicative event involving three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organisation or group, for example, to exchange ideas or opinions, to solve a problem, to make a decision or negotiate an agreement, to develop policy and procedures, to formulate recommendations, and so forth.

Schwartzman uses two criteria to define a meeting that continue to be used in the literature, referring to a) the number of participants and b) the functions of the meeting. Later, Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997), drawing on the detailed study of twelve meetings, based their definition on three principles. For these researchers, meetings are "task-oriented and decision-making encounters", "structured into hierarchically-ordered units" and involve "the cooperative effort of two parties, the Chair and the Group" (1997: 208). Holmes and Stubbe (2003) significantly extended earlier work and show that prescriptive criteria are not essential or *necessary* to feature in the meetings in their database (for instance not all meetings reflect cooperation between the Chair and the Group; see Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 59 for a discussion). Holmes and Stubbe (2003: 59) focus on the *function* of the meeting and use the term to refer to "interactions which focus, whether indirectly or directly, on workplace business". Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997) distinguish between formal and informal meetings and provide a number of characteristics to differentiate, defining a formal meeting as "a scheduled, structured encounter" (p. 207) which is organised by a Chair, has a specific agenda, and is held in an appropriate room. An informal meeting, on the other hand, is more flexible in relation to all of these same characteristics.

If we take all these definitions into account, it becomes clear that a number of criteria are used to define business meetings. These criteria consist of the following: a) formality, b) presence of an agenda, c) participants, d) Chair and Group, and e) function. However all these criteria might not be salient to *all* business meetings. And even though most of these criteria apply to some (even many), we need to caution against overly rigid definitions as meetings differ according to the context of the participants. Despite variation, in an earlier work, a claim was made for a meeting genre (Angouri and Marra, 2011) and this is still on the agenda of current research (Kim, forthcoming). Further to this, the openings of meetings in terms of function and form and the pre-allocation of turns to the meeting Chair (Barnes, 2007; Boden, 1994; Handford, 2010) or the meeting agenda have been referred to as the meeting's "structural devices" (Orlikowski and Yates, 1994: 544), features which provide meetings with a distinguishable form. Barnes (2007) has also argued that it is the distribution of turns that makes a meeting a recognisable event (also Larrue and Trognon, 1993).

If we then revisit Cuff and Sharrock (1985: 158), who claim that it is not necessary to define meetings, since participants recognise them as such, their claim is significant. While I agree that this definition is broad, the participants' views in what constitutes a meeting in their context is critical. In 2007, I defined a meeting as *a gathering of at least three participants for a work-related business event which is acknowledged as a formal or informal meeting by the participants*. Whereas, more recently, we define the meeting as a broad term which "*cover[s] heterogeneous gatherings in which people meet for professional and institutional purposes and work together on a common task and goal*" (Angouri and Mondada, 2017: 468). The aim of the latter is to better capture the variation in form and the importance of the task and shared institutional goal. This is the definition I adopt here too.

To sum up, meetings provide the necessary context for negotiating transient (and less transient) alliances and team formations. This involves temporary alliances – which depends on the agenda, participants' roles, and responsibilities, implications of the issue being discussed as well as the construction of more permanent structures such as 'middle management' or 'the organisation'. Given the role and frequency of meetings, it is an excellent event for studying organisation practices as well as processes over time. In effect, this allows for a study of 'culture at work' whatever angle of the spectrum of the phenomena the term covers that is of interest to the analyst. I turn next to the data from the three companies I intend to discuss here.

8

CASE STUDIES

In this chapter I discuss meetings taken from three organisations all of which fall in the SME range in terms of size and turnover. The organisations are all international in terms of their activities and their official language in English. They were selected as they were all in the process of transition at the time of data collection, growing and expanding their range of activities.

Orion, LeadCo, and DesignCo are all SMES: Orion with seven permanent staff, LeadCo with two full time staff, and DesignCo with forty-five staff. In all cases the data were collected following an ethnographic design and an Interactional Socio-linguistics approach. The data collection process involved ethnographic observations, interviews, and recordings of meetings. The data were thematically coded and subsequently analysed following the principles of Interactional Sociolinguistic approach (see Holmes et al., 2011 on how to use these data). Details that can identify the companies have been omitted. The relationship with the participants resulted in rich datasets which I discuss later. The analysis of each excerpt is necessarily brief and aims to show how the organisation, teams, and roles are locally negotiated and how organisational 'values' take shared meaning in interaction.

The data are all taken from business meetings which have, primarily, a decision making function as identified by the participants. The discussion is particularly concerned with the negotiation of boundaries and the construction of in and out groups (and associated strategies such as labelling, use of pronouns I/we, metacultural discourse norms, and so on) as well as the role of the director and the team and the negotiation of the power order and authority gap. Although the analysis does not focus on any particular linguistic features, floor management is particularly relevant to the enactment and resistance of power structures in general and in decision making and problem solving talk[1] in particular, central practices for negotiating organisational knowledge. Through this prism we see the organisation and its 'culture' as a local accomplishment and a resource mobilised by the participants for

their own specific goals and interactional purposes. I open the chapter with some data on the SME context before turning to Orion, the first case discussed here.

8.1 Profiling SMEs

According to The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), SMEs constitute 99.3% of all companies in the UK and account for 60% of employment and 47% of total turnover in the UK. SMEs generate 66.7% of employment in the European Union, employing over ninety million people (Eurostat, 2011). Despite these figures, SMEs are still relatively under-researched (compared to large and multinational companies).

Looking into issues of 'culture' and 'multilingualism' has typically been associated with large multinational companies operating in a range of different national and linguistic environments. This suggests a particular understanding of the core concepts which is discussed earlier. Apart from epistemological differences, however, distinguishing between 'large' and 'small' and associating 'global' and 'local' status to particular types of organisations does not reflect the nature of activities of modern companies.

In a recent paper (Angouri and Piekkari, 2017) we argued about the need to go beyond binaries and reconceptualise business activity from a more dynamic perspective. This is in line with current thinking in a number of disciplinary areas outside Linguistics, such as Organisation Studies and Management, where the emphasis on organising (Scott and Davis, 2015) is quite prevalent as well as other areas more traditionally concerned with language use in businesses, such as IB (Brannen and Mughan, 2016; Janssens and Steyaert, 2014).

Having said this, I also take as given that small companies (small defined by criteria associated with staff or turnover) provide different environments to larger structures and should not been seen as miniature large companies. This argument has already been made in the 60s (e.g., Penrose, 1959) and has been picked and debated in the literature ever since (Storey, 2016). SMEs have been associated with fewer resources than their larger counterparts (Fujita, 2012; Theodorakopoulos and Arslan, 2014). The notion of resources and an organisation's capital, in a Bourdieusian sense, is evidently important for its growth and competitiveness (Dobbs and Hamilton, 2007). The ability to respond to market changes is an essential prerequisite for the success and growth of small businesses (O'Gorman, 2001; Eirich, 2004) and flexibility is directly relevant to this. Typically, in SMEs, there is a smaller number of specialised employees, and higher tolerance for role crossing. SMEs tend to have fewer structures and are by nature 'flat' given the various roles their members take. SME case studies in different national contexts report the same core characteristics.

The owner of the business often holds the role of the ~~MD~~ and plays an important role in the life of the company and holds the role of the central decision maker (e.g., Feltham et al., 2005; Giroux, 2009). This makes the profile, expertise, and abilities of this one individual almost an existential factor for the company (Andersson

and Tell, 2009; Giroux, 2009) and has a great impact on the growth and the performance of the business (Barringer and Jones, 2004; Montserrat, 2002). The business owners or founders put a 'stamp' on their business which provides the context and is enacted in organisational practice. SMEs, particularly when the MD is the director or closely related to the company have reported to be quite autocratic with the MD holding a central role and micromanaging all aspects of running the business (Barringer and Jones, 2004). This is well illustrated here in the cases we discuss later.

Given the small number of employees involved in the SME context as well as the expectation to take a range of different roles, interpersonal relationships and social identities are tighter than larger organisations that can be anonymous and where structures and volume of turnover makes it impossible for employees to interact outside their immediate teams and domains of responsibility. This of course is not to suggest that interpersonal relationships are less important in other contexts but that in the SME context personal relationships and histories are exaggerated.

8.2 Case one – Orion

Orion is a small and rapidly growing retail firm which, at the time of the research, is in a chain of thirteen franchisee stores. Orion's main products and activities are heavily regulated as their activities fall under the 'explosives' category. This is particularly significant as health and safety as well as selling, storing, and importing products follows strict guidelines. Orion recently recruited a Communications Officer who has a challenging role ahead of her as she aims to introduce new processes for Orion's franchisee stores. By following 'Cynthia' we discuss the ways in which the new employees are socialised into the group's and the Orion practices. All the meetings discussed here have a problem solving function according to the in/formal agenda and participants' accounts.

8.2.1 Claiming and indexing group membership: the newcomer and the CEO

Two roles are of particular interest here, Rob in the privileged role of company's director and Cynthia as the newcomer. In a professional context, employees take roles that are legitimate within the context of a communicative event (e.g., the supervisor or specialised expert in meeting), but a number of other roles may also be enacted and negotiated in the same interaction (e.g., mentee of junior staff, member of a company's club, and so on). Research has shown the 'hybridity' of roles/identities individuals are often called to manage (see Sarangi, 2010 on genetic counselling and, from a different perspective, Jain et al., 2009 on academics involved in commercial activities). Further to this, role performance is constrained by the structures inherited or constructed by the group, and, its turn, role enactment reifies or challenges the status quo. Individuals in work and/or social contexts enact different roles depending on training, experience, agenda, who they are with and so on.

Cynthia joined Orion at the time of the recordings. Her case is particularly interesting as we see her navigating the existing hierarchies and dominant practices

in her new setting in the process of her enacting the 'Orion Communications Director' role. This involves her working with the core team (see excerpt 8.1) as well as an extended network of franchisees and freelance professionals. Cynthia, as any newcomer to an environment, is trying to make sense of current practice, eval–uate the way structures and hierarchies work and carry out the tasks associated with the professional role she is occupying. Cynthia (re)constructs 'Orion' and claims being 'one of us'. In this process dominant discourses about the company, Orion in this case, are brought to scrutiny and negotiated by the legitimate stakeholders (team members, wider workforce, clients, and so on). This chapter draws on five excerpts, the first three focus on the role of Cynthia in learning the ropes, while excerpts 6.4 and 8.1 focus on the role of the director and the enactment of *Orion-ness* in two different contexts where there is disagreement between the mother company and franchisee stores. Boundaries between who is one of 'us' and who isn't are enacted in the meeting event. Constructing and maintaining boundaries is the process through which an organisation emerges and legitimises participation to its core organisational practices.

8.2.2 Negotiating expectations of role performance

Learning on the job is an ongoing procedure which contributes to a company's knowledge capital as well the reification or change of practices. Cynthia in example one is being included in a decision making episode on supplies for Orion. This is initiated by Sara (Orion's ~~General Manager and~~ second in command) and is signifi–cant as Cynthia's role has no responsibility for this part of the business. Nevertheless, Cynthia joins the conversation.

Excerpt 8.1:   Orion 1: Meeting from the senior Orion team on finalising orders for the mother company and franchise shops.

1	Sara	[. . .] from what you know
2	Cynthia	from what I heard (.) is that
3		PRODUCT NAME is in high demand Nicky went like ahh
4		finally PRODUCT NAME and am full up with everything
5		apart from PRODUCT NAME and I had two three clients for
6		[it]
7	Sara	[I] just dont know what kind of quantities we need and
8		if we need to be stingy (0.5) it's what we were saying
9		yesterday PRODUCT NAME doesn't take much space but it
10		won't sell [easily]

11	Robert	[yes] we don't want to take too much
12		container space for nothing I told Cynthia yesterday one
13		box of PRODUCT NAME will last for two years it's too
14		[many]

| 15 | Sara | [yes   ] I mean it's difficult even for us to sell them |

16	Cynthia	ok if not then we could break the packages and
17		distribute smaller quantities but then that's difficult
18		as some need a handful and some need more

| 19 | Robert | Cynthia it's |
| 20 | | difficult to break the packaging darling |

21	Sara	and then you
22		know there will be an issue with the price (.) how much
23		are you going to cost this so that you can make some
24		profit and they can make some profit

Negotiating the boundaries of professional roles is evidently critical in any work-place. In a small business context role blurring is common and small teams are called to perform a range of activities. This provides versatility but can also increase risks of performance in relation to one's area of expertise. In this context, the use of *know* and *heard* in lines 1 and 2 respectively is significant. Sara orients towards an epistemic claim which Cynthia gently resists. Accepting authority in a professional context is related to enactment of role/responsibility and Cynthia is distancing by offering an opinion on the basis of what she 'heard' despite having and providing evidence from the Orion franchisees. Sara elaborates on the issue, which is a recurrent and routine one; it concerns the space a product takes on a container vs. its saleability and pricing process. The latter part of the excerpt shows that this is a recycling/expansion of the topic. Robert and Sara align in voicing their concern regarding breaking packaging. Sara interrupts Cynthia's narrative in line 7 and frames the issue of quantity and space. She offers a juxtaposition of two positions (*doesn't take much space/doesn't sell*). Robert (line 11) overlaps with a *yes*-prefaced turn and elaborates by also focusing on the specific product under discussion. Sara follows the same structure (*yes-*) in an affiliative response. As it is common in all the excerpts featuring Robert and Sara, they collaborate in construction one common front and the use of 'we' (line 11), or 'us' (line 15, referring to the mother store) is indicative of that. Cynthia takes the floor and makes an alterative proposition following and '*if*'-*then*' structure. In recent work Sarangi (2016) has written on the role work participants do in interaction and claims of responsibility. The '*if-then*' structure implies a causal link between an action and an outcome or the necessary conditions for an outcome to be achieved. Cynthia here responds to Robert's and Sara's accounts and argues for a different course of action *if-then* (lines 16–17, we break the packages, we have smaller quanti-ties). Sara however continues with a *but-then* (lines 21–22, new problem, pricing),

which pre-empts disagreement, which is what happens in the following lines. The uptake of Sara's *but-then* by Robert indicates a move towards a consensus. Although Cynthia's role is not primarily relevant to the decision in question, Cynthia is being included in the rationale and the decision making process. The use of *darling* (line 22) is interesting and can be read as a power im/balance signifier. Cynthia is Robert's daughter which is relevant to the possible readings of the form of endearment in the context (I am not elaborating on this for reasons of space).

Overall, when new members of staff join an organisation, those around them often take on a pedagogic role in displaying and performing how things work. Through these performances the organisation emerges. And although there is often an expectation that the newcomer will adapt to the new 'rules of the game', the practice is more complex and depends on the person, the power ascribed to their role, relationships negotiated between the core actors and so on. Cynthia in the two coming excerpts is negotiating her role as 'new' but claims her expertise and secures endorsement in changing current practice. A new Orion 'culture' is being negotiated by the Orion senior management.

8.2.3 Role enactment at times of friction

Cythia reports friction with some of Orion's franchisees and in the first part of the meeting she is positioning herself as 'new' and works with the other two core Orion members to build a common narrative of her experience. There is high involvement in the meeting (Tannen, 1984) and the team shares the floor, completes each other's utterances, and displays common attitude to the 'other', in this case the franchisees who resist Orion's revised guidelines.

> *Excerpt 8.2:   Orion 2: Orion has introduced a new set of regulations and Cynthia is leading the communications and implementation. The core team here discusses Cynthia's experience in dealing with Orion's franchisees.*

1	Sara	(...) it is it is unfortunately the common practice
2	Cynthia	yea <u>ohh</u> yea ((exasperation))
3	Robert	very much so
4	Sara	and the way they talk from what Cynthia says
5		[((elaborates))]
6	Cynthia	[I think maybe because I'm a woman]
7	Robert	no no it's not that (.) it's how you talk to them

8	Sara		yeah if
9		you go like *come on mate let's ((cut a deal))*	
10		[. . .] ((imitates voices))	
11	Cynthia	I am just thinking maybe I've given them too	
12		much leeway maybe I was too polite (.)	
13	Sara	no you haven't given them too much leeway	
14	Robert	the opposite (.) they are out of their comfort zone	
15		here	

Sara concludes a previous episode by offering a negative assessment (Pomerantz, 1984) of current practices which also serves as an account (e.g., Firth, 1995) for Cynthia's recent experience. Cynthia openly displays agreement and this is further enhanced by Rob's turn (line 3). Sara and Rob's assessment is particularly relevant as they position themselves as having the necessary status and knowledge to carry out a negative evaluation. As Orion is introducing 'improved' guidelines, the nega-tive assessment also evokes the 'moral' order (Bamberg, 2000) according to which Orion (represented by Cynthia) is in the right and the 'other' in the wrong. The architecture of the argument and Rob and Sara's status provides Cynthia with strong support on her activities.

Cynthia further elaborates and makes biological sex (line 6) relevant to the epi-sode. Orion is not a biologically male dominated environment and hence the refer-ence to the gender order may refer to the wider discourse on the gender gap in the workplace. This is strongly resisted by Rob with uses a categorical 'no' repeated in sentence initial position. 'No' in turn initial position has a number of different func-tions (Schegloff, 2001), here however it quite explicitly shows disalignment with the previous utterance and could be seen as a canonical form. On the basis of the uptake and rest of the meeting, its function is not to challenge but to support Cynthia. 'No' is quite rare in disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984; Angouri and Locher, 2012; Angouri, 2012) hence the force of the utterance here is not challenging for Cynthia. Sara also uses the same structure (line 13) and further enforces the Robert's position. Their turns show involvement and affiliation. This is significant as the role of the interact-ants, including their status in the organisation, their expertise as well as their local role affects if not determines the perceived meaning of their utterance. Assessments about what is acceptable and what not draw directly on the epistemic order (Herit-age, 2012). In this case Robert and Sara have both the status and are positioned by Cynthia in the role of senior management. They share enough resources for them to co-construct the role of the senior expert with Robert being in the prime position to speak 'on behalf of' Orion from his general director position.

Rob and Sara make an explicit reference to Cynthia's approach to the matter of procedure (*it's how you talk to them*). Sara's turn marks a shift to the moral stance by

referring to 'cutting a deal' and which indirectly refers to rights and responsibilities and implies that the 'other' is less likely to follow procedures and claims a positive evaluation for self (on morality see Van Langenhove, 2017). The three of them success-fully construct the 'Orion practice' from which deviance is noted and sanctioned. The team here has related Cynthia's experience with the collective Orion knowledge and provide her with identity resources for her to claim authority in her role. In doing so, the team also constructs those loosely related to Orion who are though 'outsiders'. This is discussed further in excerpt 8.3 which is a continuation of the same meeting.

Excerpt 8.3:   *Orion 3: Excerpt taken from the same meeting where Sara, Cynthia and Robert discuss the practices of the 'Other'*

1	Sara	they are used to function differently
2	Cynthia	I was talking about safety issues and they were like
3		yes yes we know
4	Robert	horse shit they know
5	Cynthia	but the price ((of
6		the product))
7	Sara	straight to the meat the money
8	Robert	you did very
9		well with the letter
10	Cynthia	he didn't respond
11	Sara	what did you expect
12	Cynthia	I was expecting he
13		would respond
14	Sara	nah nobody would have reacted any different
15	Brandon	come on Cynthia really
16	Robert	just because we demanded a reaction they got back but
17		they didn't like it that's for sure
18	Sara	idiots (.) they now pretend ((elaborates jocularly)

The situated nature of learning in organisations has been discussed by workplace sociolinguists (e.g., Holmes and Stubbe, 2003) under the CofP framework as well organisation studies scholars. For instance, Nicolini (2012) has written extensively on spaces where organisation learning can either happen or be blocked depending on the agendas and the power im/balance between different actors. The meeting event is certainly one of those spaces.

Sharing and developing expertise is part of the life of any professional and this process is particularly intense when junior employees join a practice. Shadowing novices entering a practice or a workplace is a prime time for observing senior employees making the tacit explicit and talking the organisation to the newcomer. In this example Sara and Robert continue with the same narrative and otherwise further the franchisee shops that seemed resistant to Cynthia's communication. Robert's strong language is typical of this community (see Angouri and Angelidou, 2012) but also serves in highlighting his powerful position in the Orion ecosystem. The interactants share the floor and complete each other's' turns. Robert and Sara make assessments of the behaviours Cynthia describes (note lines 10, 12–13) and in doing so evaluate the 'other'. Robert compliments Cynthia's action which functions as important endorsement given the authority divide between them in this episode (Antaki et al., 2000) as well as the power imbalance from the father/daughter relationship (Angouri, 2013). Sara's question (see Freed and Ehrlich, 2010) could be read as either a request for information or a rhetorical question which continues her narrative on 'them'. Cynthia however interprets it as the latter and shares the experience of having her communication unaddressed. This creates a unison of voices, suggesting that the shared experience is not in line with Cynthia's expectation. Robert's turn to them demanding action further emphasises Orion's position compared to the franchisees and Sara closes the episode with a mocking turn which is perceived as humourous by the interactants. In these two excerpts Cynthia is positioned as the advisee and inexperienced member of staff. Later in the meeting however, there is an interesting shift which shows nicely the dynamics of interaction as well as agency of professionals in doing identity work.

8.2.4 Doing leadership in Orion

In excerpt 8.4 Robert distanced himself from his competitors as well as franchisees and constructs Orion as a market leader. He also introduces the core value of 'customer respect'. The others align with him and a particular representation of Orion is made explicit. This claim is substantiated through a process of associating an Orion practice (set regulations) with an abstract claim 'customer respect'. I consider this significant for doing and seeing how abstract constructs, such as organisational culture, take meaning in context.

Excerpt 8.4:   Orion 4: Robert's narrative positions Orion
as a leader in the market, Cynthia and Robert disagree
over the expertise base that 'makes' the company

1	Robert	[. . .] we introduced new products and (.) if you want (.)
2		a different way of doing things where respecting the
3		customer becomes paramount(.) this will pay off

| 4 | Cynthia | maybe |
| 5 | | not today or tomorrow |

6	Robert	yes not immediately but our
7		investment will pay off (.) there is not one in a
8		million it won't (.)we know what we are talking about
9		we're professional(.) we follow and apply all the
10		safety regulations far and above the minimum or the
11		expected we are the best

| 12 | Brandon | they are just rude |

| 13 | Cynthia | yes you've |
| 14 | | seen that |

| 15 | Robert | and you will see much more take my word[…] |

16	Brandon	we always take the time to be polite to everybody […]
17		even when they ((get on our nerves–narrative follows))
18		[…]

19	Robert	what we did with ((the project)) is a brand new
20		approach they don't have specialised personnel for us
21		it's just daily practice for them it's a complete
22		revolution in the market […]

| 23 | Cynthia | well (.) they have a different vision |

| 24 | Robert | no they don't have specialised people Cynthia |

| 25 | Cynthia | and neither do we |

| 26 | Robert | who says↑ |

| 27 | Cynthia | I am not a specialist ((in |
| 28 | | marketing)) |

27	Robert	wait a second here you are not specialised but you
29		translated your site (.) you reached new
30		markets you increased the visibility of your products

| 31 | Sara | […] we can start from zero from the bottom and get |
| 32 | | straight to the top |

| 33 | Robert | this ((provides a long example of a project)) how did |
| 34 | | we handle it↑ |

Cynthia works with him and allows him to expand and elaborate (note the extension of the turn in lines 6 and 15). Cynthia seems to have accepted the position offered to her regarding the deviant 'other'. Brandon also aligns with the rest of the team, offers a late assessment and uses it to construct Orion not only as customer oriented (outward facing) but also 'polite' to everybody (compared to 'them' being rude in line 12). The Orion-*ness* emerges in the metacultural discourse and the ingroup is associated with two very important positive charac- teristics which are made explicit for Cynthia's benefit and work for the group's collective identity claim. Robert's 'our time will come' heroic narrative (lines 6 ff.) projects Orion to the future and adds more positive characteristics to the

Orion team which reaches a peak in line 22 (*we are the best*). Praise (Hallett et al., 2009) and effusive language is in line with Robert's leadership style and the team does not respond or take it up in any marked way. Robert continues on his narrative and Orion is represented doing being the leader as a routine. He is contrasting daily practice (*for self: easy/routine*) to complete revolution in the market (*for the other: outside its sphere of possibility*).

As the meeting evolves, a marked shift is noted in Cynthia's positioning. From claiming a novice position, Cynthia challenges Robert directly. This is done in two stages, in line 23 with a *well*-prefaced turn she claims the floor and attempts to tone done Robert's positioning of Orion as the market leader. '*Well-* in initial position has been very usefully discussed in CA work (e.g., Heritage, 2015; Pomerantz, 1984; Clayman, 2013) and is shown to index disalignment which is the case here too. Robert rejects Cynthia's account and provides his own alternative. Despite the authority difference between them, Cynthia takes up the direct disagreement and rejects her being positioned as an expert. Robert's challenging question to Cynthia (line 26) which has a rather rhetorical function and the enactment of Cynthia's role through her activities, despite her claiming lack of formal training in marketing, is indicative of the disagreement between them. Direct disagreement is unmarked for the community, but it is still visible and Cynthia decides to not fight the case any further; she lets Sara and Robert to elaborate on Orion's positive attributes.

Turning now to Robert and his role in enacting Orion-*ness*. In this episode Orion's 'values' as well 'ambitions' were brought to the fore through the interactional work of the team. Cynthia aligned with their positions but not in this episode. In the interview data, she provides a useful counter narrative where she claims a professional role of a cautious professional and claims that "what I wanted to communicate is not that our firm is not good but we shouldn't underestimate our competitors [. . .] translating a site has nothing to do with marketing the way I see it" but she also comments on her silence: "you see I don't say anything again because this would start an argument ((with Robert))".[2]

Avoiding negatively marked disagreement is common in the workplace (Angouri and Locher, 2012) and a number of strategies are mobilised by interactants in maintaining a harmonious work relationship while at the same time push their own agenda and interactional goals (Marra, 2013). This is evidently exaggerated in the case of newcomers. Cynthia's behaviour is in line with the Orion style which favours directness, as well as the small business context which is reported (Mahili, 2014) to favour informality compared to larger structures – it also matches my own observations of this and other projects over the years.

Despite this, Cynthia does not pursue further and the interview data provide one possible reading of this interactional decision. The interview data, however, also constitute metadiscouse and are co-constructed with and for the researcher (see earlier discussion on interviews). Cynthia positions herself as a professional in the safe space of the interview and sheds some light on the 'unsaid' in the case of this particular meeting.

Interactions such as the one here are important not for their own individual value nor for the interest of the sequence itself in my view. They provide a window in the actors' role enactment. The practices of those actors constitute Orion. Instead of looking for values and ideals outside the local context, the line taken here is that focusing on the interactional detail allows to see how the organisational order emerges in the here and now (see Figure 8.1). The ethnographic detail of the environment and the multiple datasets allow to connect the situated moment to its wider context. This is significant for unpacking local meanings. I am concluding this case by looking into a negotiation of a past decision between Robert and a regional franchisee manager Brandon.

8.2.5 Expanding Orion – What's (national) culture got to do with it? Metacultural discourse in action

Orion had, in the past, considered the acquisition of a store from which it finally withdrew. In this excerpt Brandon and Robert discuss this issue.

Excerpt 8.5: **Orion 5: Robert is put in the spotlight here in providing an account for a past decision. In doing so he foregrounds ideologies that circulate in Orion and used to justify practices and negotiate the power im/balance between Orion and the franchisee stores.**

1	Brandon	I mean your priority is ORION ((ORION's growth)) and
2		fair enough of [course]
3	Robert	[hang on] a sec what do you mean ORION
4		(.) it wasn't in ORION's interest to open a new store
5		in PLACE
6	Brandon	well (.) there were other issues there (.) [we
7		didn't like ((partner)) she was [names ethnic group]
8	Robert	[who said that]
9	Richard	this is how the rumour has it
10	Sara	no no
11	Robert	no who said that
12	Nick	she was ((ethnic group)) but showed huge interest [. . .]
13		was very keen on a store
14	Sara	we always said there could be something there but we
15		never met officially
16	Brandon	really

17	Nick	[. . .] and that I have a good [network]
18		((imitates voice))
19	Robert	[come on] Brandon
20		don't listen to rumours and jump to conclusions
21	Sara	I heard what Brandon says but nothing on the record
22	Robert	I don't give a damn where anybody comes from (.) I
23		don't care if they
24		are are NATIONALITY NATIONALITY ETHNICITY ETHNICITY or
25		anything (.) if they meet our criteria and can perform
26		according to our targets we don't care what they are
27		and where they are from
28	Nick	agree
29	Robert	ok↑ apart from this=
30	Sara	=anyhow I don't think (.) there was
31		nothing sentimental about all that (.) only TEAM FROM
32		THE AREA promised to cover LOCATION ((that the
33		suggested store would cover)) [. . .]

Brandon explicitly refers to Robert's role duties and obligations to look after Orion. Robert's uptake indicates that he takes this statement as criticism and challenges Brandon directly. The directive 'hang on' (line 3) followed by a direct question contributes to a rather aggressive tone and provides a statement on Orion's behalf. In doing so, he also offers an assessment on his decision in question. As it is common in disagreement sequences, the participants form alliances and here again Sara and Robert, align in challenging the account presented to them. It is one of the very few excerpts where issues of nationality and ethnicity are made explicit to a business decision in interactional data. Richard, a senior manager in Orion, supports Brandon in the 'rumour' which Sara and Robert strongly resist. The participants take a reflexive stance and engage in metacultural discourse throughout this excerpt with Brandon associating place with ethnicity and a particular decision (not opening an Orion store) (lines 3–7) The use of *no* prefaced utterances (line 10–11) and Robert's challenging *'who said that'* is indicative of their stance. Although Sara elaborates on the position and accepts that the rumour was known to her, Robert's strong statement is significant. By naming nationalities and ethnicities he puts forward a strong goal/performance driven narrative which goes beyond affiliation or identification with nationality. The strong language and emphatic delivery make the key of this turn possibly confrontational. This could be relevant to Nick's quickly showing agreement, possibly in an attempt to avoid further confrontation. Robert is ready to move to the next topic (similar to an agenda item). Sara, however, interrupts this process and compared to Robert's rather emotional turn, provides a goal–oriented justification, contrasting 'sentimental' decisions to Orion's targets and the need for supplying in particular geographical locations.

Distancing themselves from the original accusation of not '*liking*' or setting a partnership 'because of culture', Sara and Robert provide a narrative for Orion which is performance driven and beyond any other attachment. This of course does not mean to say that Robert and Sara do not have their own likes/dislikes or ideologies, nor does it show the 'truth'. It does show however that culture is mobilised in everyday business contexts and endorsed or resisted as a factor to take into consideration. Robert produces an ideological statement which also functions as the version of *what has actually happened* given Robert's role. This is extended by Sara who legitimises and confirms Robert's story as the official story against any other versions available (van Leeuwen, 2007).

Bringing all five excerpts together, the power associated with the director's role becomes evident. This however is not static but negotiated and resisted locally in the meeting event. Robert's positions are resisted (see e.g., excerpt 8.1) or supported by the rest of the Orion team in enacting Orion's or their own agendas and local purposes. Abstract values and ideals are put forward in relation to explaining practices in place and in this process individual and collective identities are performed. The informal style favoured by Orion's director and accepted or tolerated by the rest of team distinguishes the mother company from the franchisee stores and this is apparent in the disagreement sequences. *Ways of doing* become explicit when the tacit is challenged, either in processes of socialisation of new employees like in the case of Cynthia, or in the case of changing practices and processes.

Looking closer in the negotiation of practices ~~and ways of doing~~, the second case is concerned with a strategic meeting in a small consultancy firm. The role of its director, 'Tom' and his new 'second in command' is again relevant to the ways in which decision making and problem solving are enacted in their context as well as in the construction of the context itself.

8.3 Case two – LeadCo

LeadCo is a consultancy firm which is, at the time of the research, in the process of growing and expanding its activities. At the same time, the owner of the business is approaching retirement which brings a change in the hierarchy. This is often difficult in small businesses where the owner is also the CEO/MD. Sonia is now the second in command and works closely with Tom in LeadCo's decision processes. The development of this relationship and commitment as well as the various management challenges emerge frequently in the whole dataset. The eight excerpts following illustrate these issues as well as LeadCo's emergence in the decision making (DM) process.

We focus on the role of Tom, the company's director and Sonia, the MD. The interview excerpt 8.6 provides a description of the issues that LeadCo is called to address, namely the size and distribution of responsibilities as well review of processes in moving from a one person's Decision Making (DM) model to a distributed one.

Excerpt 8.6: *LeadCo 1: Interview excerpt with the MD*

1	Sonia	um obviously in talking to tom you're aware that we're
2		a relatively small team (.) um pretending to be quite
3		a lot bigger than we actually are (.) so it kinda
4		involves wearing quite a few hats for both of us (.)

The following two snippets, from a conversation with both partners also indicate the importance they attribute to the, still, emergent relationship between them. These displays of loyalty in the interview context are significant in showing how the two partners construct an 'in group' which is ratified by Tom in his privileged role and his full support – '100% backing'.

Excerpt 8.7: *LeadCo 2: CEO and MD joint interview*

1	Sonia	in fact at the moment we are probably discussing far
2		too much with each other cause it's quite a new
3		relationship it tends to be kind of absolutely passing
4		everything past each other [. . .]
5	Tom	I /X/ think we've always said whatever decision an
6		individual makes (.) and I'm talking primarily about
7		the two of us (.) I might not agree with it (.) but
8		once it's been made and you've made it (.) 100% backing
9		(.)

The significance of relationships in the business context is well known and has been exhaustively discussed in workplace discourse literature (Angouri and Locher, 2012). They are however more pronounced in the small business setting given the intense relationship and need for collaboration between a small number of people within close physical proximity.

LeadCo is a particularly useful case for looking into the dynamics of role enact-ment and DM in relation to this particular SME context. Sonia's narrative and qualities projected on Tom as a director allow her to construct herself as a responsi-ble professional who is building expertise and takes on her senior role. At the same time, traits associated with Tom and especially the 'papa bear' label indicate his posi-tion and role in the company and its ways of doing.

Excerpt 8.8:   LeadCo 3: Interview excerpt with the MD

```
 1    Sonia    [. . .] um yes until now it's been very much uh tom's baby
 2             and what tom decides he wants to do is what happens
 3             (.) um in /X/ the nicest possible way and he won't
 4             mind me saying this (.) Tom is one of these that
 5             unfortunately gets quite easily swayed by other
 6             people's opinions (.) which means one /X/ day he'll
 7             think something's a brilliant idea and the next day
 8             someone else will have said something and /X/ oh we'll
 9             do that instead! I think he finds it rather difficult
10             to actually now have to ask someone else's (.) not
11             permission but certainly their opinion before going
12             right then this is the next thing that we're doing (.)
13             so um I think he personally finds that quite a
14             challenge (.) I /X/ think he's quite enjoying it (.)
15             um and he's certainly enjoying being able to pass the
16             buck on some things (.) as /X/ we all do (.) um not to
17             take quite so much responsibility for it but um yea
18             it's /X/X/ interesting (.) I mean there there's
19             certainly still an element of papa bear there I think
20             (.) I /X/ although I'm getting better at making my own
21             decisions on things um (.) you know it obviously it
22             takes time (.) it's been his until now (.) and that
23             said he's been a very fair chap and it – I mean I know
24             that whatever decision I made (.) he would back (.) as
25             long as I believed in what /X/ decision I'd made (.)
26             so it's uh I'm hoping it's quite a fair and equal kind
27             of uh (.) respectful relationship that we have but uh
28             time will tell I'm sure
```

The interview data provide a useful insight in the struggle between control and distribution of DM which is very common in the SME context and particularly the small end of the SME spectrum. Tom's professional persona emerges in and through Sonia's narrative in relation to core business activities. DM is at the heart of the narrative with Tom constructed as the decision ratifier who finds it difficult to share while Sonia finding her feet 'progressively' (lines 20–21). Although this narrative can cast a negative light on Tom, the framing in 'the nicest possible way and he won't mind me saying this' and ending with him being a 'a very fair chap' and the two of them in a 'fair and equal respectful relationship' offset the effect of the negative criticism and foreground the strength of the relationship which is already indexed through the 'papa bear'. Not the repetition of 'fair' and juxtaposition of fair and 'backing up'. This strong alliance and positive relationship is also shown in the meeting excerpts below in 8.9 and 8.10.

These are drawn from a strategic meeting where the LeadCo senior team discusses the recurrent and significant issue of the organisation's membership. As with Orion in Case one, the role of the CEO is central in the process as well as in the ways in which organisations and their ways emerge in and through the interaction. This is a useful meeting for our discussion as it is a strategy meeting and expands the discussion of the issues raised in case one. Strategy meetings are extraordinarily difficult to access and hence there is relatively little work on them (Vaara, 1999, 2000) particularly in SMEs. In this particular case, a number of decisions are reached by the interactants. These are considered, by the participants, significant for LeadCo's future and the organisation's engagement with its target business.

The first two excerpts draw on a recurrent issue, how LeadCo can enhance the relationship with its membership base.

8.3.1 Constructing the organisation – Us/them

In this excerpt the core team, Tom and Sonia, and two consultants working for LeadCo discuss how to best engage LeadCo's membership base to the work of the company. Given the nature of LeadCo's activities (business consultancy), a strong and active membership is central to its financial viability.

Excerpt 8.9: *LeadCo 4: The LeadCo team frames a key problem, the engagement with the membership and moves towards the finding of solutions.*

1	Dan	[. . .] absolutely (.) I agree and we can't do the strategy
2		(.) it's absolutely impossible to do the strategy for
3		these guys (.) you can only work with them and that
4		takes ((elaborates on the difficulties)) I'd be quite
5		nervous with you know (.) if it was targeted lapsed
6		umm associates that's one thing erm because they've
7		shown at least some initiative and some interest (.)
8		but if you've got lots of sleeping sort of (.) you
9		know (.)associates who've been drafted in (.) it
10		wouldn't be an appropriate thing to be doing would it
11		(.) I don't think

12	Tom	I /X/ think the notion of um (.) uh
13		sleeping partners or members and lapsed quite
14		interesting (.) because how can you have lapsed from
15		something you never belonged to in the first place (.)
16		how can you be sleeping in something that you've never
17		been awake in (.) so I find those two notions of

18		sleeping and lapsed membership quite interesting [. . .]
19		It may well be (.) but I dont believe the membership
20		has ever seen itself as a membership (.) because
21		there's been nothing to belong to so I think we've
22		we've got a bigger problem uh (.) than the one that's
23		being articulated at the moment (.) [. . .]
24	Steve	yea
25	Tom	to build something to belong to (.) because we can't
26		do that (.) or can we↑
27	Sonia	[. . .] yes it's whether or not they're awake enough to
28		even read it or want to be want to belong to it (.) I
29		mean (.) I've identified we've got at the moment NUMBER
30		MEMBERS across NUMBER branches (.) and I think I
31		established that probably NUMBER of those are what we
32		would possibly describe as active (.) that are actually
33		genuinely trying to put on events or talking to us
34		again about what can be done and all the rest of it um
35		(.) to use your terminology (.) I think I had seven
36		down as sleeping (.) which left NUMBER semi conscious
37		((laughter)) um (.) there may be stuff going (.) I
38		mean I sent out a questionnaire last month to all
39		MEMBERS who have been with us for more than a year
40		(.) asking them to let us know what /X/ they've been
41		doing [. . .] I've had one back (.) I've had two emails
42		(.) well one letter here saying I will do it at some
43		point (.) I had an email saying I'm on holiday so I
44		can't meet your deadline so I replied no problem (.)
45		thank you (.) let me have it when you can (.) still
46		haven't and I had one hmph (.) fairly blunt email that
47		it was uh (.) misthought that I should be asking what
48		they'd been doing because quite obviously they were
49		doing enormous amounts um (.) from one corporate member
50		who was seemed to be quite offended at the fact that
51		I suggested that because I didn't know what they'd done
52		(.) that meant they weren't doing anything
53		((sarcastic))
54		
55		((text omitted Sonia reclaims the floor))
56		
57		so yea the problem appears to be engaging um (.) with
58		them and (.) I think there is (.) people want to do it
59		but at the moment people are so (.) the people that
60		we're talking to are fee-earning people within a firm
61		(.) and I don't think they have got the time the
62		capacity the interest to be looking at what we're

63		trying to get them to do um (.) that's trying to get
64		through to the marketing people is uh (.) because they
65		/X/ don't appear to communicate with each other (.) the
66		people who are doing the work aren't talking to the
67		marketing people (.)
68	Dan	yea
69	Sonia	now that's (.) either
70		something that we can't
71	Dan	= well perhaps
72	Sonia	get through so we either need to find a way or drop it
73	Dan	actually since /X/ we've been talking about narrative
74		and stories ((text omitted))

The floor is collaboratively shared between the four interactants. The construction of the membership as inactive through 'sleeping' metaphors are commonly used by the team to refer to its membership and it emerges again in this excerpt (line 8). Dan provides an account on the task LeadCo has to shoulder, the strategic planning. Dan and Tom work closely together in positioning 'the membership' as the Other '*for these guys*' and which is associated with a number of negative characteristics, lack of *initiative* and *interest* for instance. The excerpt is significant as labelling is explicitly negotiated, and the categories, '*sleeping*', '*inactive*', and '*lapsed*' are juxtaposed and debated. Tom's is enacting his role by (re)formulating the situation and accentuates further by labelling it a 'problem'. This is a significant move, as the 'problem' is associated with negative connotations and risk in a workplace context (Angouri and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011; Kim, forthcoming) and requires a negotiation of a solution. This part of the meeting paves the way for a range of decisions that are reached later and provides the context for the interactants to debate the ways in which LeadCo engages and constructs its members.

Sonia picks up (line 29) and provides a detailed account of the 'problem'. With a well-orchestrated floor management, Dan, Tom, and Sonia have raised the issue and ratified it as a 'problem' for LeadCo. Given the strategic meeting context and their respective roles, all in the senior management, the alignment is significant and frames the rest of the meeting in a solution oriented mode. When Sonia reclaims the floor, line 55, she reiterates and confirms 'the problem'. *So*-prefaced utterances (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003), and the act of summarising, indexes and constructs a position of power and Sonia here claims her role as both an expert in the issue and senior in the company. She also occupies a significant interaction time in the meeting which further emphasises her role. Claiming expertise and negotiating power are directly related in the workplace. 'Expertise power' (Fairclough, 1989; Dwyer, 1993) is significant for

the production and circulation of new knowledge and hence it constitutes capital for the organisation's sustainability and growth. Sonia introduces a solution move (lines 64–65) which is about involving marketing contacts from the participant companies. This comes with a further elaboration on the problem that LeadCo does not reach the members' marketing departments. Despite the importance of this account (see excerpt 8.10 following), this is not immediately picked up as Dan provides a distraction to the course of the interaction (not shown here).

We are only eighteen minutes in the meeting and the participants have already succeeded in framing the problem and creating a clear Us/Them boundary by reaffirming their commitment to each other and constructing the organisation's boundaries. The nebulous nature of problem solving and decision making talk has been well discussed in relevant literature. In this case the issue has come up before and its status as a 'problem' is an agreed position interactants have in common. LeadCo, as seen through our dataset, is oriented towards reaching consensus in problem solution activities. This is reflected and in line with the tone of the meeting, in a Hymesian sense which is collaborative. An orientation towards agreement is not unusual and CA studies have provided evidence in business meetings (Asmuß and Svennevig, 2009). Tom's privileged position, however, emerges and is reaffirmed throughout the meeting and the same applies to Sonia's role.

In the following excerpt 8.10, from the same strategy meeting, Sonia is revisiting her suggested solution.

8.3.2 Reaching a decision point

The interactants continue to debate how to best engage and increase their membership. This issue is recycled in the whole dataset but the discussion often remains inconclusive. In this meeting, however, a series of decisions are discussed and reached. In the excerpt below, excerpt 8.10, Dan, Maria, a consultant working on LeadCo's publicity, and Sonia, MD and Tom's close collaborator build a decision to engage the members' marketing departments.

Excerpt 8.10:   LeadCo 5: The team elaborates on the agreed problem on the membership and debates the suggested solutions

1	Maria	[. . .]I don't think because people didn't send the
2		questionnaire back they're not interested (.)I think
3		it's about how we engage with them
4	Sonia	=yea
5	Dan	=I agree with
6		that well you know I do

7	Sonia	=yea which is why I think we
8		have to get the marketing people along with (.)
9		there's no point talking to all the people that know
10		what we're trying to do (....) and think yea that's brilliant

| 11 | Maria | yea that's a brilliant idea |

| 12 | Sonia | =and that's really lovely |
| 13 | | (.) yea good idea because they're too busy |

14	Maria	=yea I think it's a really good idea (.) I think that
15		will help enormously because you're right it's because
16		it gets put to the bottom (.) and the marketing people
17		will be like why didn't you tell us [. . .]

18	Dan	=I think /X/ it does come down to the actual culture
19		of the organisation (.) I think if the organisation is
20		(.) you know from (.) I think there are some /X/ of
21		the professional services are much more proactive in
22		actually new business regardless of whether it's
23		family business or whatever as well as profile raising
24		and I think those /X/ business are probably more aware
25		of LeadCo and how LeadCo may /X/ or may not work for
26		them in their marketing (.) the other organisations
27		are just generally you /X/ know are for whatever reason
28		just culturally marketing isn't important or they
29		don't understand the role of marketing (.) then I think
30		you're probably right they /X/ (.) as naturally they
31		don't (.) I mean it's really interesting with this
32		NAME forum because the response you get from NAME
33		versus NAME is completely different (.) you know NAME's
34		all over (.) it responds almost within minutes of
35		something coming over and it's /X/ all the minutia
36		detail (.) whereas with NAME with NAME I haven't met
37		NAME but I would imagine she's got no experience really
38		in marketing (.) and she's an administrator (.) and
39		someone said right okay someone's got to do bloody
40		marketing here (.) someone has to c'mon /X/ I tell you
41		what (.) right we got rid of the last lot (.) everyone
42		thinks marketing is sort of your exit /X/ room to
43		redundancy (.) better just give it to the PA (.) just
44		give it to her to do it (.) I'll bet that's where NAME
45		is (.) I'm seeing NAME this afternoon (.) I'll bet
46		he's not aware of LeadCo and he's the marketing
47		director of NAME and he's based in PLACENAME and NAME's
48		in PLACENAME (.) so I just think I think it's a really
49		good suggestion and I think those marketing people
50		that turn up will actually be the ones that are more
51		integrated [. . .]

The excerpt 8.10 is again indicative of LeadCo's consensus–oriented style and way of handling task assignment and allocation. All parties involved are senior employees and, despite Tom's central role, they tend to operate on equal footing. Orienting towards building consensus is commonly reported in DM and leadership discourse (Holmes et al., 2011) as well as teamwork (Djordjilovic, 2012) literature and is an important strategy for displaying commitment and enacting an *in group* category.

The lack of formal structure both in the meeting and in the DM process is indicative of their environment and constitutive of its ways of operating. Sarangi and Roberts have argued that "decision making is not simply out there waiting to be realised in some common–sense way" (1999a: 34) foregrounding the need for understanding the local interactional context within which this process takes place.

Setting the problem frame in place, Sonia's proposition (lines 7–8) ~~'but~~ *if we involve their marketing departments'* is met with enthusiasm straight away. The turn, ~~prefaced by *but*,~~ introduces an alternative action and can be read as Sonia's distancing from Dan's earlier suggestion (not shown here). *But*-prefaced utterances have multiple functions from turn continuation and resumption to assertion and disagreement (Bolden, 2010). Sonia's reclaiming the floor and the decision making context, which involves debating different suggestions, is also consistent with the use of 'but' (Schiffrin, 1987) in turn initial position. The use of conditional and first person plural, makes the contribution open to negotiation and contributes to the team effort.

'*But if*' and '*what if*' structures are all common in the dataset and in line with the decision making function of the meeting. Speakers offer proposals and the prefacing has a range of functions from reducing the force of a declarative to opening the floor for shared decision making. The exact function (interrogative or declarative) of the conditionals is related to the role of the participants and can create opportunities for others to participate in the decision making process (Stevanovic, 2013). Given that this is a strategic meeting which involves the senior board of LeadCo, this structure also indexes sharing responsibility and commitment to the agreed position. Extending this further, and *if-then* formulations are significant for probability talk in professional interactions (e.g., Sarangi, 2002). It is also a useful strategy for making an ideological statement (Edwards, 1997).

Although there is 'buy-in' by the participants, Maria and Sonia work together closely in building up the suggestion. The continuous latching shows the participants' consensus (Sarangi, 2010). Dan's turn seems to echo a previous discussion '*you know I do*' (line 5) but he does not intervene in the discussion and leaves Maria and Sonia to work on the suggestion which is later in the meeting further elaborated and ratified by Tom, in the visible position of decision 'ratifier'. The excerpt is collaborative and Sonia and Maria share the floor and echo each other (note for instance lines 11–13). They use a common metalanguage referring to the proposed plan as 'brilliant', 'lovely', and one that would 'help enormously'. Although there is no disagreement and all the participants allow for the interaction to progress, there is no ratification, until the end of the meeting, as to whether marketing departments will (or not) be formally invited to take part until later in the work of the participants.

The frequent use of 'yes/yea' prefaced utterances and the exaggerated praise are indicative of the alignment and excitement in building towards a decision. Yes/a-prefaced utterances can have a resumptive function (e.g., Atkinson and Heritage, 1984) and work as continuers. The elaboration of the 'engaging the marketing people' position can be read as collaborative work between the team and leads to a decision which is recycled and fully endorsed by all participants. This includes Tom: *'And so just to engage with the marketing people, I absolutely 100% agree with you'* (see also the 'timeline' later in this section). Explicit assertions of agreement are used by the interactants as they jointly elaborate the proposition which takes traction and reaches a completion point.

Dan's long turn from line 18 provides further justification to their 'decision on the make'. His professional background, in marketing, provides him with the epistemic authority to position the current members as both lacking in relevant skills and not acknowledging the importance of marketing. Metacultural discourse draws on 'marketing culture' in this case. Specifically, the members' lack of engagement with marketing is attributed to their (organisational) culture. This organisational culture construct provides a good tool to reduce the complexity of the issue 'how small businesses handle marketing'. It also serves the purpose of boundary maintenance between those who understand (*us*) and those who don't (*them*) – *'for whatever reason just culturally marketing isn't important or they don't understand the role of marketing'*.

I return to the 'not understand' claim at the end of the chapter; it is important to note here that Dan's doing of organisational culture is part and parcel of the practice of him constructing his role and justifying his view and actions. The constant repetition of stance markers like 'I bet' and 'I think' (line 45) index a position of power where he foregrounds his own personal views as significant for the matter under discussion. Literature on 'I think' (Holmes, 1990; Aijmer, 1997; Schiffrin, 1987) is rich and has shown that it has a range of functions in expressing doubt and certainty in talk. The speakers construct their authority in the meeting event and epistemic markers are useful tools (Schiffrin, 1987) in positioning self and other – as Dan does here. The uptake shows that this position is not challenged by any of the other interactants. Dan's 'I'll bet that's where NAME is' and I'll bet he's not aware of' substantiates his earlier claim of the 'lack of management culture' and strengthens his agreement with the current suggested action.

The tone leans towards informality, and the use of slang and swearing 'bloody marketing' (lines 39–41) 'c'mon' (lines 40) indexing familiarity between the participants. The convergence of views and 'quasi agreement' throughout allows for diversions or elaborations of positions already put forward. Given the importance of the matters discussed in the meeting and implications for LeadCo, it is expected that the different positions will be debated at length. Controversial or issues that are perceived as 'high risk' are negotiated in relation to the participants' areas of responsibility and in relation to the possible implications and consequences. Risk in itself is a construct (see special issue by Candlin and Candlin, 2002) relative to ideals (societal, organisational, and individual) and which is commonsensically commodified in modern society as something that can be 'reduced' or 'managed'.

Identification of 'high risk' situations are associated with expert knowledge and assessment rights (Sidnell, 2009) and responsibilities which are negotiated in situ.

This contributes to the complex architecture of decision making meetings in the workplace which has been shown repeatedly by literature both in sociolinguistics and organisation studies (Vaara, 1999, 2000). DM talk follows a spiral interactional roller–coaster. When the process involves recurrent 'problems', such as the one discussed here, the roller–coaster becomes longer and more complex. In DM, the 'here and now' heavily draws on past decisions and the shared historicity of their context. This allows the interactants to negotiate shared meanings and attributions of responsibility. Elaboration, recycling, and reformulation are common acts used by the interactants strategically depending on their role and aims of the encounter in order to build consensus and also to manage and strengthen interpersonal relationships.

Space does not allow a detailed analysis. The LeadCo team in this meeting reached a decision following a set of cyclical moves as per the timeline below:

- Marketing raised by Sonia (00: 18: 01)
- Picked up and elaborated by Maria (00: 22: 01)
- Recycled by Maria (00: 22: 55)
- Debated by Sonia (00: 24: 41)
- Topic changed and brought back by Dan (00: 27: 04)
- Recycled by Tom (00: 45: 49)
- Debated between Tom and Sonia (01: 09: 01)
- Decision ratified by Tom (01: 18: 15)
- Recycled by Sonia (01: 37: 15)

What this timeline shows is the work of the different actors for constructing the common decision as well as the cycles through which the topic was elaborated (for more on the different stages of decision making see Kim, forthcoming). In the interview that followed soon after this strategic meeting Tom provides an account for LeadCo which usefully shows his perception of a relationship between his own style and the organisation's modus operandi:

Excerpt 8.11:   *LeadCo 6: Interview with CEO. He elaborates here on the characteristics of LeadCo.*

1	Tom	I think we have very little ((structure)) um (.) we're in
2		disparate places and geographically uh we are not connected
3		(.) so there isn't a central place where people come to
4		/X/ share ideas and (.) usually most of it is done by email
5		or by telephone um (.) I think we have got by just and it's
6		not going to be good enough in the future [. . .] here as I
7		don't think I've ever been structured in my life (.) so I
8		might um profess to believing that the organisation should
9		have structure when reality is I quite living in chaos (.)

Through the use of exaggeration for humorous intent ('e.g., living in chaos'), Tom provides a justification for what may be seen as a lack in the company's ways of work. And he foregrounds his impact on the company —– *if I don't have structure = the organisation doesn't have structure either*. Constructing his style becomes a resource for constructing the organisation.

Back to the meeting, having reached an agreement point, the team turns to the practical matter of organising a conference. The meeting is nearing its closing and Tom takes a more active role in floor and agenda management. The following excerpt shows the mundane of organisational routine which, contrary to the earlier issues, are perceived by the participants as 'simple' and 'operational'. The team's orientation towards consensus and shared task management is again evident and the interactants co-construct their roles and areas of expertise (Sarangi, 2016) by positioning self and other to the relevant activities they are associated with them. Task allocation is related to the way an organisation manages its routine and non-routine activities and the way hierarchies are enacted or resisted. It is also one very common purpose of workplace interaction (Vine, 2009).

8.3.3 Managing task allocation

The excerpt is taken from the same meeting and after a commitment to go ahead with a conference. It displays a series of quick decisions made in relation to publishing the event.

Excerpt 8.12: LeadCo 7: The team negotiates the production of marketing material nearing the closing of the meeting

1	Tom	=so do we need to get a flyer done↑
2	Dan	<pause ~ 3 sec> yea
3	Tom	then we need to get that done pretty soon
4	Sonia	=soon
5	Tom	can you get that done by when(.) end by September at
6		the latest↑
7	Dan	=I just need two days (.) I mean I don't think it's
8		about what it looks like I think it's more about just
9		email and a follow–up phone call (.) I (.) what we do
10		with our MEMBER NAME is you phone them up say look
11		we're looking to run a conference it's going to be
12		about this /X/X/okay can you send me some information
13		and you send on an email and they've got it (.) so we
14		/X/ think a phone call first (.) if you look at all
15		the direct response marketing uh (.) it's three times
16		more effective to lead with a phone call and then

17		follow–up
18	Tom	=so why don't who's /X/ going to do it then↑
19	Sonia	=I'm quite happy to do the phone calls (.) it would be
20		nice to get some sort of not script (.) but certainly
21		bullets of what I need to be saying you know just so
22	Dan	I know that's what peter and I will coordinate (.) if
23		I trash down some bullet points to you ((talking to
24		peter)) and then we can let Sonia have it by the end
25		of the week if that's okay with you
26	Sonia	right(.)okay
27	Dan	okay(.) right
28	Peter	I'm not around at all literally (.) until the end of
29		next week which is scary but it's just I'm just
30		literally not here (.) I'm in the car
31	Dan	=okay um (.) I can try and do [something at the weekend]
32	Peter	[I mean I can pick]
33		(.) pick it up I can pick the emails up in the evening
34		and respond but I'm just not around
35	Dan	=I think what Sonia needs to do is start calling next
36		week um and so you just want a script type thing and
37		use that as the basis for an email (.) okay I'll do
38		that (.) but if we're all going to chip in
39	Sonia	kind of yea
40	Dan	let you have that say by Sunday evening um
41		yea and I think um I think that
42	Sonia	=yea (.) just you know few bullet points of the key
43		questions and what I have to tell them

Tom introduces the issue with the suggestion of producing a flyer (line 1). The use of 'we' by senior leaders is commonly used to display team membership (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003; Djordjilovic, 2012). This is well noted in both socio-linguistic literature (Holmes, 2005) as well as leadership as discourse literature (Clifton, 2014). The four senior managers collaborate in managing and claiming/allocating the tasks that emerge in their enactment of the conference event.

Tom's suggestion for a flyer is met with a long pause (line 2), followed by agreement by Dan. Given Tom's and Dan's roles, this agreement is also committing the organisation and Dan's 'yea' also indexes his accepting taking on the task. Sonia supports Tom by repeating the time pressure 'soon'. Repetition for emphasis is quite common (Sidnell, 2009) and Sonia once again aligns and displays agreement with Tom; the two managers operate as a single party. Tom moves to a direct task allocation

and control, which Dan helps by elaborating with a series of acts: his turn frames the time that needs to be allocated to the task and he then also suggests a sequence of activities. Consistent with his style, the frequent use of pragmatic markers, such as *'I think'* and *'I mean'*, index his personalised views as well as expertise and taking owner-ship of the issue. He uses a narrative, pseudo-dialogue with LeadCo's members, which projects on and provides justification of his suggested course of action.

Tom immediately picks up and opens the floor for the task, endorsing the sug-gested set of activities. In the following lines Sonia, Dan, and Peter (Dan's colleague) work together in task management. Sonia takes on the act of calling possible del-egates but allocates the authorship of the script to Dan and Peter who resists by foregrounding time constraints – note the repeating of the 'literal' absence (lines 28 and 29). Dan's 'okay' seems to accept Peter's account and offers to work on the script over the weekend, to which Peter counteroffers to pick up emails in the evening. The interaction is smooth and the participants construct a commitment to the plan by taking ownership of the tasks and by positioning activities in specific, bounded time units. This, evidently, has accountability implications which are self-allocated. The company's small core workforce, as well as small senior management is arguably related with management practices and role enactment. Task allocation has been initiated by Tom's *so*-prefaced question (line 18). Amongst 'so's canonical functions is to prompt action (Johnson, 2002) and this is what is happening here. The ensuing interaction shows the participants orienting towards the common tasks and co-producing an agreed schedule of activities.

Interesting to note that Tom does not participate after initiating the discussion until the very closing. This maps well on the roles and responsibilities of the other participants as well as a possible move by Tom to distance himself from operational matters. By taking on and allocating tasks the interactants also successfully construct their team membership, reaffirm their position in the 'in-group' and its practices for managing routine activities such as the one discussed here. As in the earlier excerpts, the continuous latching and *yea-* (lines 41), *okey-* (31) in turn initial posi-tions index convergence and the interactants' commitment towards role alignment. The team successfully constructs commitment to the agreed course of action and this is clearly visible in the way the floor is managed.

The LeadCo team seems to be aware of its style of work and the size constraints. As Sonia notes in an interview:

Excerpt 8.13:   LeadCo 8: Interview with Sonia where she elaborates on the core characteristics of the LeadCo.

1	Sonia	it's really hard because we're so small (.) in a way
2		um (.) we're governed at the moment by the amount of

3	work we do by the resource that we have (.) it's
4	chicken and egg um (.) and with it being such a small
5	team (.) it's really very difficult to say that we're
6	responding to market when (.) the market itself is so
7	restricted um (.) so I don't know [. . .]

This is common in small/medium size businesses particularly in transition and growth where scarcity of resources puts pressure on employees. The way different firms manage is related to established practices as well as preferences, experiences, ideologies, and so on. Change in an organisation's environment triggers reaction by those in senior positions. Change in management structure in the case of LeadCo with Tom's planned retirement and handover triggers changes in common pro-cesses such as decision making activities.

To conclude, the analysis has shown that the process of constructing professional roles and identities is related directly to the process of doing organisational work. Further to this, accepting responsibility for problems and decisions are related to the roles and responsibilities of the participants. In both Orion and LeadCo the role of the CEO/owner is significant and visible as the epicentre of all set processes. This, however, is not simply inherited with the role or the structure in place. It is actively negotiated between the actors. The participants' orientation towards agreed practices, is significant in unpacking tacit norms and ideals. Overall, a close focus on interaction from an IS approach provides a conduit into workplace practices and the actors' multiple ways of doing as well as the ways in which local meanings are negotiated at the organisational level.

No dataset, however, is a 'complete' representation of what is going on. Data collected through different tools can provide multiple angles and a way to cap-ture the different accounts that constitute representations of people's perceptions of their daily lives at work. The LeadCo meeting data provided an insight into the process of reaching a decision in a relative short time span following shared floor management and collaborative decision making style – notwithstanding Tom being positioned as the ultimate decision maker and/or ratifier. In the next and final case discussed here, I turn to a middle manager who is openly and heavily resisted in his attempt to change the organisation's modus operandi and by extension the organisation itself.

8.4 Case three – DesignCo

DesignCo is a successful small company which is the process of transitioning to a medium size and which is, at the time of data collection, introducing and implementing a middle management structure. DesignCo started as a design

company grew over the years to provide custom exhibition services as well as a variety of other activities. The owners' investment and commitment to its growth led to an expansion and DesignCo includes dedicated teams in design, exhibitions/symposia, project management, production, business management, and finance.

The company is split over two sites, one in the UK and one overseas. The company's owner is in the overseas office and the MD, close partner and co-owner, in the UK. The main rationale for the split is the owner's ambition to grow the customer base and make DesignCo known to its new overseas base.

The two partners recently brought a third member on board, Jack, as a member of the Executive Management Team and Operations Director. Jack has a background in project management in a large company and is keen to implement structure which, in his and the senior management's view, will facilitate growth. Jack has a difficult task ahead of him however; the old staff resist change and the new staff have no clear sense of collective identity or shared purpose. DesignCo has recently implemented a middle management team which Jack is managing directly. We zoom in Jack's interaction with this team and the nuances of collective construction. Jack has had a significant impact on the business at the time of the research given that Martha (CEO) and Becca (MD) were away for large part of the year preceding the study. Martha moved to the overseas office while Becca was on maternity leave. In the following sections I discuss thirteen excerpts that illustrate Jack's attempt in implementing structure and change in DesignCo.

8.4.1 What/who is the company? Identity in crisis

In the two cases we saw earlier, the employees constructed the company's core business consistently and without too much negotiation in the data. It quickly became obvious that DesignCo was different in this respect; the employees were resisting a collective identity and/or lacking a sense of common goal. This emerged in all datasets collected in the company which consists an excellent case of 'identity in flux' and struggle.

Excerpts 8.14 and 8.15 illustrate the point:

Excerpt 8.14:   DesignCo 1: Excerpt from a focus group including two researchers and DesignCo participants

1	Researcher 1	say you are in some sort of a party and someone
2		asks you what you do and what your company does
3		what do you say in urm 15 20 seconds
4	Focus Group	(2) ((silence))
5	Researcher 2	so?

> ### *Excerpt 8.15*:   *DesignCo 2: Excerpt from a focus group including two researchers and DesignCo participants*
>
> ((same question))
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | 1 | [. . .]one of those things I am thinking what do I do so |
> | 2 | many times it always comes out like ehm I mean |
> | 3 | trying to explain that would be rather impossible that'd |
> | 4 | be |

Change makes the tacit explicit and in providing opportunities for renegotiating practices and organisational knowledge. What became quickly visible in the data was a lack of consensus in the company's main/core business. Moving from a design company to a multi-services one, DesignCo seemed to afford different identities for the different teams. This is particularly apparent in the ways in which employees' construct loyalty to DesignCo through membership in their own teams in the dataset.

With Jack being relatively new and implementing a new set of structures, ideologies about '*who we are*' and '*what we stand for*' became visible and scrutinised between teams. For the 'old' staff DesignCo is a *multidisciplinary design agency* for Jack it is an *[event] management implementation service* and for the MD and co-owner it is a *creative company* which *project manages* a range of different activities. These different categories are associated with different practices in the data; in their turn these practices construct and reify boundaries between formal sections of the company as well as between informal communities. A multiple and multilayered *Us* and *Them* divide is widespread and often referred to as a source of frustration in DesignCo. DesignCo stuff construct their identity by drawing on metacultural discourse resources and different boundaries emerge in the process.

Jack, in enacting his Operations Director role, set as a priority to implement systematic processes across the board and harmonise all the teams and their distinct practices. This, evidently, is a political act and associated with control distribution in the company. Those who have been in a position of power under the 'old regime' are understandably unhappy with these developments; the 'new' ones who are keen to take a greater part in the power distribution within the company are supportive of Jack's agenda. These processes were particularly visible to the employees and depending on the politics between teams are constructed as *necessary* or *irrelevant/stifling the business*.

> ### *Excerpt 8.16*:   *DesignCo 3: Phil, a dynamic and ambitious middle manager very vocally supported the need for discipline*
>
> | | | |
> |---|---|---|
> | 1 | Phil | but personally I think over the last few months it's |

2		become really apparent that the general population of
3		DesignCo
4	Int1	hmm
5	Steve	have got to freedom
6	Int1	hmm
7	Phil	and it's maybe a bit too nice
8	Int1	hmm
9	Phil	which is great (.) and (.) and it is really ((banging
10		noise)) when it's (.) when it's good (.) but when
11		you need to instil some discipline or (.) or come to
12		conclusion and stuff (.) we just go round and round
13		00: 02: 20
14	Int1	hmm
15	Phil	in circles
16	Int1	hmm
17	Int2	yeah
18	Phil	so everybody has a say (.) and they should be↓
19	Int1	hmm
20	Int2	hmm
21	Phil	but I think (.) at some point (.) once everybody had
22		their (.) their words ((background voices)) (.) the
23		people at the top need to sort of say right we've um
24		we've taken on board whatever (.) that this is now
		the action

The analysis of the interview shows the split between the old–timers who have been with the company from the beginning and newer staff who position themselves as more forward looking. The following issues are enacted and labelled as 'problems' in DesignCo in interviews, focus groups, and observations: [lack of] *current structure, relationship between senior/middle (ops) management, relationship between teams, strategy for growth, flat hierarchy (as a negative) – no leadership*

The 'new' structures come under scrutiny and become sites of resistance and contestation of the existing status quo. Competition and clashing agendas between teams in organisational settings are certainly not uncommon. This however is particularly pronounced in DesignCo. In the focus groups Jack is constructed as the 'owner' of the new structure and criticism is voiced particularly in relation to (the lack of) leadership and vision.

The following excerpts from meeting talk illustrate these positions:

In excerpt 8.17, Jack is positioned as the key actor in implementing 'process' and this is attributed to his own professional history – rather than DesignCo's business needs.

> **Excerpt 8.17:   DesignCo 4: Ben, Bethan, and Mark openly resist the new system introduced by Jack**
>
> | 1 | Ben | I think it's probably down to you know a lot of the |
> |---|---|---|
> | 2 | | focus on processes down to Jack and Jack's background |
> | 3 | | you know and that kind of company that he worked for |
> | 4 | | before but there are quite a lot of things that where |
> | 5 | | having that much process despite all those people's |
> | 6 | | ability to get things done and then also rather than |
> | 7 | | enabling people it actually stops people from wanting |
> | 8 | | to do things you got a lot of resistance |
> | 9 | Bethan | =yea it would be different if it was an agency of say |
> | 10 | | 200 people where those processes actually then would |
> | 11 | | be needed but we're in an agency that tis quite small |
> | 12 | | so I don't really think you need all those to go |
> | 13 | | through it's quite easy just go next door and talk to |
> | 14 | | someone rather than having to go through a copious |
> | 15 | | amount of ((straits)) to get one thing changed |
> | 1 | Mark | just doing it rather than being told how you have to |
> | 2 | | do it |

The excerpt 8.17 provides an account constructing DesignCo as well as project-ing criticism and devaluing the effort put in implementing 'processes'. By labelling the focus on process as of 'coming from another company', the two employees resist the agenda and do professional expertise and authority in their evaluation. They create the category '*small business*' and position DesignCo in it (see, *that kind of company, agency of 200 people vs. quite small*). This category is then associated with a flexible model where set processes are not needed and are actually damaging from the business. The two speakers successfully reject current practice and implicitly criticise the expertise of anybody who superimposes practices that are not fit for purpose. Despite some mitigation (e.g., line one 'it's probably') all speakers here align in constructing the 'not necessary' argument (see e.g., 'yea' in line 9 and the co-telling of the narrative between all three speakers).

The employees who participated in the focus groups were randomly selected from the total workforce. Interestingly they clearly converged in constructing loyalty to the company's first owner and CEO–Martha. This was a consistent position throughout the dataset. Jack, despite his senior role, was positioned as an 'administrator', an out-sider who does not appreciate DesignCo's 'culture'. This, in the local context, is an act of resistance which impacts on Jack's ways of doing leadership in his setting.

Professional role enactment and expertise are directly related to the ways in which senior employees do leadership. Excerpt 8.18 is useful in illustrating how Martha occupies the privileged position of DesignCo's leader while Jack and Becca

are positioned in a very different level in the semi–public context of the focus group. Martha is projected on DesignCo and her personal traits and 'energy' are associated with DesignCo's development and growth. Multiple readings are possible here; the employees construct an idealised persona, Martha, the transformational leader in this context. This can be a strategy to distance self from current management structure and vent frustration; or it can attribute sense (and blame) for a lack of vision to the current, present, senior managers. And it can also index an attempt to make sense of their own roles and positions in the company in relation to a mother or hero figure. Or some or all intertwined (Alvesson and Billing, 2009; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012).

Excerpt 8.18:   *DesignCo 5: The excerpt illustrates Martha's standing in the company*

1	Natalie	ehm I think Martha ((CEO)) coming this week could be
2		great I think having that energy and that leader back
3		in the office will be really good but she'll go back
4		to OVERSEAS again and I think ehm (.) that's a big
5		one for me (.) it's also an energy that comes from a
6		leader it is and ehm Jack and Becca are
7		administrating process ((inaudible)), which is great
8		
9		just you need absolutely need but Martha was the
		character the energy

What seems to clearly emerge from the data, is an attribution of blame to cur–rent management for the company's lack of growth despite setting procedures and transitioning to a structure that mirrors a larger, medium size company. Paul, in .19 provides a quote that illustrates a common position, the lack of ability to expand the company's client base and bring in more profit. The newly established and dedicated 'sales team' came under scrutiny in the focus groups and interview. Paul, a senior employee with long service in DesignCo, directly rejects the 'stupid targets' and associates the inability to meet targets to a lack of direction of travel.

Excerpt 8.19:   *DesignCO6: An excerpt showing the accounts employees project on the new management structures*

1	Paul	the only time I've seen that is in the sales meeting
2		with these stupid targets would you ((inaudible)) me↑
3		we're gonna go out and get 500000 pounds worth of
4		NAMES business where↑ where is it gonna come from↑

5	you know it's great put a number on it and say that's
6	what we're gonna get but at the moment I don't get
7	the sense that we know how we're gonna get there

Process in the data is associated with *boundary imposition* – dividing lines and preventing from doing as well as a *boundary crossing* – allowing to grow, reach new businesses, enhance offering. As the employees negotiate this new environment, the senior management describes DesignCo as ~~'stuck'~~ and not *'where we should be'*. The quotes below illustrate some of the common positions in the data.

The 'identity crisis' is enacted throughout and this label is recurrent; also used by Jack in constructing a necessity for change and justification for growth. Jack, in the interview context, constructs as a priority a focus on empowering the operation board to be able to independently run the projects without the continuous involvement of the executive board. This target was echoed by middle managers who seemed keen to take on more responsibility. Perceptions of empowerment however were very different between Jack and the middle managers.

8.4.2 Implementing a new process: standing meetings

Jack's vision to empower the operations board is associated with the introduction of a regular morning meeting event, scheduled to take place every day and meant as a fifteen-minute 'touch base' and 'planning' opportunity (see Sarah narrative in Section 6.1). These meetings, however, quickly morphed into regular meetings which lasted over an hour. Jack's presence and chairing of the operations board turned the business to direct day-to-day management of the work.

The three excerpts below correspond to the closing of three meetings recorded by the team; the issue of the length of the meeting is evident. All three closings end with general laughter. Laughter in meetings can afford multiple readings. It can indicate familiarity, closeness (Glenn, 2003), as well as collegiality and support (Holmes, 2006). This however is not always the case as it can also be associated with managing embarrassment or face threat (Holmes and Marra, 2006) and the closing of a bounded event (Boden, 1994) such as the case we are discussing here.

Excerpt 8.20:   DesignCo 7: The closing line from Jack's chairing of the morning meetings includes clear reference to their marked length

1	Jack	thanks everyone (.) well that's another short morning
2		prayers (.) ((laughter))

| 1 | Jack | yeah, okay↓ so for the record that was an hour long |
| 2 | | morning prayers (.) we're usually usually |

3	Nick	=an hour and
4		a half ((laughter))
5	Jack	thanks everyone (.) well that's another short morning
6		prayers ((laughter))

Instead of Jack's repeated comment passing as a joke, it indexes the closing of the meeting and it is consistently followed by laughter. Meeting openings and closings (Asmuß and Svennevig, 2009) are considered to be the 'structural' features of the event and associated with the role of the Chair in the meeting event. The function of these standing meetings adheres fully to the normative meeting structure and they are clearly controlled by Jack. Laughter here indexes adjourning of the meeting.

Jack's 'leadership' of the ops board seemed to be perceived by the middle managers as dis/empowerment. In the fieldwork data, their excessive length was mentioned a number of times as 'eating' productive work time and in a training that was designed by the researchers, Jack's heavy handed involvement was raised as a challenge as shown in the snapshot in excerpt 8.21 (blurred for anonymity).

This is taken from a training where the two researchers worked with the middle management and invited the team to draw a list of the challenges they currently face. The issues that emerge map directly on the themes that emerged from the focus groups and interviews.

Excerpt 8.21:   DesignCo 8: Transcript from a focus group chart where the middle managers listed the prime challenges and areas in need of attention

1 Empowerment	2 Roles and Responsibility
• How: [senior management] Step back from day–to–day matters • Team Autonomy • No senior management in operations meetings • Greater autonomy in communicating to senior management	• Clarity, Transparency • Communication, Boundaries • Core strength/ focus

3 Growth Strategy	4 Consistency of [senior management]

- Dedicated, ring fenced growth team
- Roadmap to clear, tangible,
  measurable, and feasible goals
- Resources
- Advisory Board (Industry and
  Company Site Experience)

Empowerment is an interesting concept, which, as with all other big words dis‑ cussed, constitutes both a first and a second order concept (Outila et al., in review). Without going into the theory around it, it is clear that there is a clash between what constitutes empowerment in DesignCo for the different actors. Given that empowerment involves allowing 'access to power', this will inevitably mean differ‑ ent things to the different people (Lincoln et al., 2002). Despite the strong resist‑ ance, Jack also enjoys support of some of the newer staff. Support and resistance are not monolithic positions and employees negotiate and scrutinise their own and their teams' agendas in the local context of the different events in their workplace.

To develop this further, I look more closely at two meetings involving Jack and the middle management. Jack's commitment to process and change is negotiated in the later excepts. In all excerpts the team supports Jack and aligns with his positions. I discuss how alignment is achieved and how role performances indicate an ongoing struggle with cur‑ rent practice at DesignCo. I close this chapter by connecting back to issues raised in Part 2 on the value of multiple dataset for unpacking the complexity of ways of doing at work and I introduce a frame for the study and interpretation of workplace discourse data.

8.4.3 Implementing structure

The first excerpt is taken from a meeting where Jack interacts with a team that per‑ forms up to their targets. Jack as well as Becca are consistently positively disposed over the work of the team:

As an illustration in the introductory interviews, constructing the company for the researchers Jack argues:

Excerpt 8.22: DesignCo 9: An interview illustrating Jack's views on the team

1	Jack	the exception I would say would be the NAME team which
2		I think they see themselves as a team (.) they promote
3		(.) they outwardly communicate themselves as a team
4		(.) and I think the people they deal with recognise
5		them as a strong team

Jack's preference for set procedures is a recurrent theme which was, at the time of our study, re–cycled and negotiated in different guises throughout the dataset. It is interesting to note that despite his evaluation of the team's performance he is negotiating here the team's ways of managing their ongoing activities. The excerpt occurs towards the closing part of the meeting.

8.4.4 Constructing the team/organisation

Excerpt 8.23:   DesignCo 10: Excerpt from a meeting under Jack's new structures where he promotes the need for a formal away day

1 2	Jack	so we're in a really good place (.) basically (.) which is a really good (.) obviously from my perspective [. . .]
3 4 5 6	Mo	yeah (.) we've obviously worked with the clients for a full year now and we've worked with NAME (.) even though they're still a pain in the arse (.) we all know them quite well [. . .]
7 8 9 10 11	Mary	I was speaking [. . .] also going to do (.) over the coming weeks (.) for our key milestones (.) the NAME presentation (.) so we've sat down with nick and he's given me the stuff so I just need to collate everything
12 13	Jack	great excellent (.) are you guys still having your regular team meetings together↑
14		(2.5)
15	Mary	erm >we just stand up and chat< ((laughter all))
16 17 18 19 20 21	Jack	yeah (.) but are you talking about things↑ you know (.) like as a team again (.) maybe some more of the softer stuff (.) erm (.) and also the key strategic milestones and (.) the <u>process</u> (.) the ways we can make things better or all those kinds of things (.) are you having regular
22	Mo	hmm, I: no (.) not really↓
23	Jack	no↑
24	Mo	we <u>do</u> touch base with the NAME every other Friday↓

25	Jack	yeah (.) but you were planning to have an annual
26		((tapping fingers on table)) team ((tapping)) session
27		((tapping)) this year↑ because obviously you need to
28		feed me in (.) the way (.) in terms of direction and
29		the business tracking [. . .]
30	Mary	you mean a day out↑
31	Jack	yeah
32	Mary	oh cool (.) I'm sure we can
33		schedule one in ((laughter all))
34	Jack	I knew you guys would do that

The *so*-prefaced utterance is in line with Jack's chairing style and his preference for controlling of the interactional floor which is consistent in the dataset. *So-* has a number of functions, including marking topic management and is a useful strategy for doing control in institutional talk (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003; Drew and Heritage, 1992). *So-* here contributes towards concluding the earlier section and to provide a summary and evaluation of performance in which Jack enacts his role as director and senior manager. Mo's uptake further elaborates, it is prefaced by a marker of stance, *yeah–*, indicating agreement. He provides a justification for the team's success, and in doing so he enacts expertise and his role as senior project manager. By labelling the clients 'a pain' (line 5) he claims an in group position for the team and positions the team as experts who can work with difficult clients. Jack's approval comes quickly and strongly (line 12).

This however is followed by a question on team's processes which leads to turbulence. The silence followed by Mary's hesitation marker, indicates potential interactional trouble between the participants (Ford, 2008). Mary's humorous attempt (line 15) and laughter elicitation allows the team to align for what is coming in the following turn. Although Jack's *yeah-* followed by a pause can be read as a consensual disposition, this is modified by *but-*, which brings back a serious tone to the interaction. The reformulated question comes through an elaboration and justification on the importance of regular meetings. The repetition of 'regular' (lines 13 and 21) as well as the emphasis on process are all in line with the 'new' DesignCo Jack is attempting. The tone of the turn is informal and the formulation *'but are you talking about things'* requires an elaboration which is introduced with *'you know'*.

The function of 'you know' in interaction has attracted a lot of attention in the literature on discourse markers (e.g., Schiffrin, 1987; Stubbe and Holmes, 1995; Holmes, 1986, 1990; Holmes and Stubbe, 2003; Ostman, 1981). Pragmatic markers in general and 'you know' in particular have been associated with politeness as well as floor management strategies. 'You know' here creates space for agreeing on team

behaviours and also buys Jack time as he builds up his account in an incremental way. His account however is met with resistance. Mo takes the floor with a hesitation marker that commonly indexes skepticism, *hmm*, and a repair from an *I-* prefaced formulation to a direct negative statement repeated twice. Lines 23 and 25 can be read as a struggle between the interactants with Jack challenging Mo further and Mo foregrounding current practice. The emphasis on 'do' (line 24) meets the criterion of regularity. Jack seems to shift from the weekly meetings to the annual away day which is delivered with emphasis added by means of tapping on the table. Mary's turn comes to the rescue and lightens the episode by offering a way out; moving from Jack's 'annual team session' to 'a day out' offers a face saving line and a compromise which all parties accept – Mo's silence contributes to that effect and the laughter in line 33 closes this sequence. Jack takes back the floor and confirms approval. Focusing on an organisation when it is reviewing or changing established practice provides a window in the tacit knowledge and the ways in which the status quo is negotiated between the various actors in their daily routines at work. In the case of DesignCo, Jack's style of management and mission is visible in the organisation and not accepted without resistance. The very project of growth seemed to be taken under scrutiny; Mo's quote illustrates a dominant discourse we encountered, *the risk of quick growth*:

Excerpt 8.24: DesignCo 11: Interview with a middle manager on the characteristics of the organisation

1	Mo	I think I mean it's great to be ambitious and to have a
2		sort of five year plan and we wanna be eh double our growth
3		and have but ahm there is a risk behind as well in terms of
4		going too big too quickly

The emphasis on procedures to facilitate growth was widely and openly resisted; it was attributed to a single individual who was constructed as 'responsible for change' (excerpts 8.23 and 8.24) and a fraught relationship between *process* and *empowerment* is recurrent in the dataset as excerpt 8.25, also shows:

8.4.5 Constructing the team-and the structure

Excerpt 8.25 is taken from one of the team's morning meetings. We join the meeting when Jack announces the decision for DesignCo to withdraw from a project. The frequent use of first person singular, the repetition of 'want' as well as verbs in relation to Jack's wishes (*would like to ask, have got*) foreground his perceived rights in relation to his role in the company and local role as the Chair of the meeting.

Excerpt 8.25:   DesignCo 12: The team is debating the end of a project that is making a loss for DesignCo

1	Jack	it will just stop (.) I have got to really today to
2		figure out what is the strategy for disbanding the
3		project (.) what I would ask as well is what I'm
4		telling you now guys is just not for (.) again it's
5		for the operations board ears only at the moment (.)
6		because what I want to be conscious of is how we
7		present the closure of the project in a positive
8		light to the team because I don't want people to
9		think *oh something else has failed* from a positive
10		aspect (.) so we have got the learning and
11		development of the two images [. . .] so for me
12	Pete	I think it's a good thing (.) because it shows them
13		we are not going to just keep taking things on and
14		shoving money into them [. . .]
15	Alan	and letting everything just progress and there is
16		objectives and [. . .]
17	Pete	absolutely
18		[. . .]
19	Jack	absolutely (.) I'm glad you guys have said that (.)
20		that's the key positive thing the NAME process is
		working
21	Pete	yeah
22	Jack	and it's hard (.) because it's trying to
23		re-enforce that at executive board level as well (.)
24		we're trying to [. . .] get everyone involved (.) the
25		process is really important
26	Pete	yeah
27	Jack	all of these processes are really important (.) they
28		protect us from putting too much money in↓ we have
29		to spend money to speculate (.) but we spend the
30		minimum amount before we realise (.) before we can
31		really have a clue if we have a project or not (.)
32		and that's what this was
33	Alan	yeah and you stop throwing good money after bad
34	Jack	yeah absolutely [. . .] and we do as a small organisation
35		do quite a lot of work for charity (.) so the actual

36		investment in these individuals was part of the
37		(.)yes there is a relationship between Jo and Ellen
38		but also we have had those two individuals have had a
39		great opportunity and they have certainly learned a
40		lot which they will be able to use in their careers
41	Phil	and we did say not so obvious someone like Nick who
42		needs to have these NAME projects that we can't offer
43		him day to day at the moment but we see nick as quite
44		an asset we want to keep (.) but he is highly
45		motivated and ambitious and we need to drip–feed
46		these projects in (.) so even as a brand for his
47		portfolio and for us that was a huge benefit as well
48		I think

The use of pronouns is again quite indicative as in line with previous excerpts Jack is geared towards an 'I' identity, providing an account for his views while the rest of the team leans towards claiming a collective identity. Pete, Alan, and Phil in the meeting align their role with one another, cluster around Jack (Kanagasharju, 2002), and provide an elaboration and justification by reinforcing the benefit of standardisation. As Jack's narrative includes a possibly difficult decision for the team, *having to announce the end of a project*, the rest of the team works hard to align possibly to also indicate a positive assessment of the decision (Schegloff, 2007). Jack's opening utterance indicates a clear–cut decision which allows no space for negotiation *'It will just stop'. Just-* has a number of functions (Lee, 1987) it is clearly emphatic here as also indicated by the prosody.

The three middle manages project an 'Us and Them' distinction between the operation board and their teams and share the floor in building consensus around Jack's decision. This indexes a team identity and endorsement for Jack in this con-text. The *and-* prefaced sequences (Bolden, 2010) are particularly important here. Conversation analytic work has shown the role of *and*-prefaced turns in continuing the preceding turn or completing the turn. All participants use *and*-prefaced for-mulations echoing each other in performing continuations and extensions of the points raised by the others in the meeting. For instance, Alan, line 15, *'and letting everything just progress'* adds to the point raised earlier by referring to the 'objectives' that the projects need to meet. This is in line with the core issues Jack is introduc-ing and the strong positive reaction is indicative of this. *Absolutely*-headed formula-tions allow the speakers to display agreement as well as professional expertise and epistemic authority in adding to the discussion. The reverse scaffolding we witness here starts from Jack's decision and is justified backwards. This is enacted skillfully through the four employees' incorporating each other's suggestion into the nar-rative that is to be presented to the rest of the company. *And-* formulations allow for this building up and incorporating their points of view into one coherent line.

The three line managers position self in a supportive but subordinate role leaving the Chairing to Jack. The tone is collaborative and there is repetition in all their turns throughout. Repetition is a useful strategy in indexing involvement and agreement (Tannen, 1989). Their alignment is further attested by explicit strong agreement and intensifiers such as 'absolutely' (line 17–19) which are useful in showing strong opinions as well as strong agreement. The core contribution in this excerpt is Jack's narrative which, following the issue of the project in question, also constructs DesignCo as a 'small ~~company~~' (line 34) but one that takes its social responsibility seriously (line 35) and invests in people and charity, but also has the moral duty to 'protect' its limited resources. The latter is a recurrent theme in this excerpt first raised in line 28, followed in line 34 and finally line 45. In parallel the commitment to the process is enacted, where the process is attributed agency to protect the company. Given that DesignCo is in the process of introducing new structures and practices, these meetings shed light on the incremental process of introducing and getting 'buy-in' for new ways of doing. The participants' joint work in those meetings reveals the process of introducing new practice in the specific context of DesignCo.

To sum up, DesignCo is going through a troubled time and multiple struggles are noted in the data. While the employees report high satisfaction levels with their own local teams, remuneration, benefits, and interpersonal relationships, a whole range of practices emerge in relation to the 'what is DesignCo about' question. Extensive identity talk is noted in the data and the DesignCo employees draw on metacultural discourse in negotiating 'who they are'. The importance of interpersonal relationships as part of the organisational culture construct emerges frequently in the dataset. Note for instance the quote by Becca:

> ### Excerpt 8.26:   DesignCo 14: DesignCo as constructed in Becca's narrative
>
> | 1 | Becca | and that's kind of the culture we set from the start |
> |---|-------|--|
> | 2 | | is that we will all (.) if there's a problem (.) or |
> | 3 | | if something's tight timeframes (.) we will all muck |
> | 4 | | in and do things that aren't normally in our daily |
> | 5 | | jobs (.) that's just the way we are |

Unlike the other two cases, DesignCo provided us with a context where change was actively resisted and the opposing employees drew on metacultural discourse to position the middle manager as 'the outsider'. In all three cases however narratives about the cultural *Other* are common and used by employees in achieving their interactional goals and organisational practices. The 'Other' is associated with strong evaluations, be it the American lady in the previous chapter or Orion's franchisee

stores in excerpt 8.2, the lack of marketing culture in LeadCo's membership base excerpt 8.10 or the small business mentality in DesignCo's old–timers in excerpt 8.17. The 'you don't understand' stance is recycled throughout narratives of differ–ence (see Tannen's popular 'you just don't understand' title) and provides a mecha–nism for distancing self from the other.

In order to unpack those local meanings and practices I made a case for multi–method studies and a need to break the micro/macro analytical artefact. Figure 8.1 aims to provide a visualisation of the micro–meso–macro levels brought together in the situated moment of interaction. The 3D core of the graph aims to illustrate the importance of powerful *imaginaries* and self–identification with self–ascription to different communities and their symbolic capital as well as the expectation of performance projected on the individual by others. This interplay is instantiated in the negotiation of practices in the employees' local context.

Ethnographic designs and an IS approach to the analysis of workplace interac–tion allows a focus on the business event, as in the case of the data in these chapter,
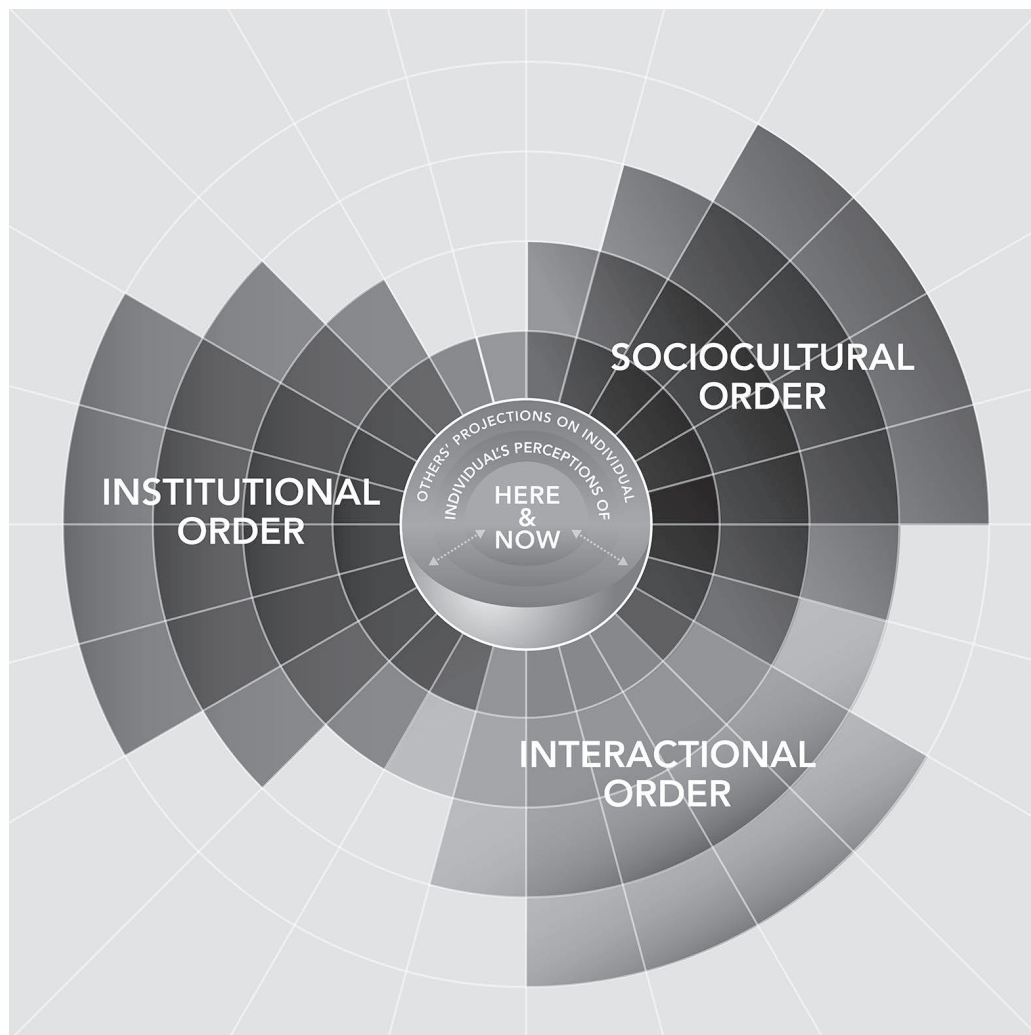

FIGURE 8.1 A model of contextual interpretation

and position the interaction in the interactional and organisational order. At the same time IS has not been systematically used for the analysis of the political and ideological side of the workplace. Bringing together IS with critical perspectives can offer a way forward as I discuss in the next and final chapter of the book.

To conclude, the excerpts discussed in this chapter showed the complexity of enacting professional roles and the identity struggles at the level of the individual, the team and the organisation. These 'levels' are important tools for guiding the discussion of the findings but can also skew the representation of the participants' realities for the reasons discussed earlier. Having access to a rich and diverse dataset allows the analyst to connect the multiple perspectives and provide patterns for future research to explore beyond the micro/macro binary. It also affords opportunities to engage with the analysis of metacultural discourse as organisational practice in non-evaluative language. Terms such as culturalism are undoubtedly useful but also add a priori negative connotations to the discussion of practices. A neutral stance could contribute to a dialogue between different disciplinary areas addressing the role and function of metacultural discourse at work and lead to more synergies between disciplines.

Notes

1 In earlier work (e.g., Angouri and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011; Angouri and Angelidou, 2012) we kept a distinction between PbS and DM. We approached PbS and decision making as having distinct characteristics in that "Decision making is the *selection* of an alternative; problem solving, *the invention* of an alternative" (emphasis in Angouri and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011). Although the distinction can be analytically useful for studying different aspects of the phenomenon, the two are facets of the same coin and drawing boundaries between where one starts and the other ends is not straightforward. The analysis of data from different workplaces and from different angles has shown that the two concepts often get differentiated in the narratives of the participants. Decisions are associated with a 'commitment' – aptly defined by Miller et al. (1996) as "commitment[s] to future actions" (Miller et al., 1996: 305) – while problems are seen as negative/risk situations requiring further or different to current action (Angouri and Bargiela, 2011). Although interrelated they are not synonymous and the latter is typically part of decision processes (see e.g., Alby and Zucchermaglio, 2006 and in Kim, forthcoming).
2 The father/daughter relationship is relevant to the two actors as well as their perceived rights and responsibilities. I do not probe here for reasons of space.

9

CONCLUDING REMARKS

'It would be so nice if something made sense for a change.'
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Culture(s) are social constructs, they come alive through membership. Culture(s) do not possess people; it is those who believe in them who construct them through participation in symbolic meanings that (a) community/ies produce, circulate, or resist. In the workplace, this process also allows the individual to construct self and distinguish between us and them. Culture(s), then, are not 'states' but practices associated with powerful ideologies and are linguistically enacted. Shared practices emerge in and through interaction. At the same time metacultural discourse is a powerful recourse for constructing professional self and other. I see 'culture and identity' work as interdependent; employees index membership to a community through active participation in the community's practices. In this process competence to "'read' the local context and act in ways that are recognised and valued by other members" (Contu and Willmott, 2003: 285) is central and becomes a resource for organisational practice. Although Contu and Willmott in this quote refer to situated learning, this is directly related to the ways of participating in a community's work. As Mondada argued "work settings show that members indeed exploit all possible linguistic (and non-linguistic) resources in order to organise and achieve their goals" Mondada (2004: 19). Sacks has famously termed culture as an "inference-making machine" (1992: 119) and the work of John Gumperz has also shown how the speakers negotiate and turn abstract social meaning to situated inferences about speaker intent. Given that the workplace is a political space, this interpretive process encompasses negotiating the power imbalance that comes with hegemonic discourses around race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, age,

status, and so forth. Discourses of cultural difference and banal culturalism, which I discussed under metacultural discourse, provide resources to reify or resist power relationships and hence are particularly useful tools in the political environment of the workplace.

Everyday life at work involves negotiating personal and group roles and areas of responsibilities as well as establishing or challenging normalities and hierarchies of common sense. Culture is often referred to as the way 'we do things around here'. This however presupposes that there is one set way of doing and that it is agreed and visible to all members of a community. It also implies a degree of sharedness of the experience which may or may not be the case. For instance, taking part in a meeting does not provide the participants with shared meaning of neither the agenda nor the outcomes. It does provide however with a shared experience. The relationship between shared experience and shared meaning is well discussed in sense making literature mainly associated with the work of Weick (e.g., 1995). Although there is little interaction between workplace discourse analysts and business scholars, which is inherently limiting for both, Weick usefully suggests: "If people want to share meaning, they need to talk about their shared experience and hammer out a common way to encode and talk about it" (Weick, 1995: 188). And later he argues "[c]ulture [. . .] is what we have done around here, not what we do around here "(Weick, 1995: 189). I would add here the significance of the *speaker's metarepresentation of practice in a particular context*; the speaker represents the ways in which things have been done around here for a reason as we saw in Chapter 8. Through enactment of shared meanings the organisation comes into being and the participants' multiple realities are mobilised. To expand then on Weick's quote, culture can be seen as *what we say we have done around here in a particular moment in time for a particular purpose*. Employees in any organisation setting have come across the powerful 'that's how we've always done it here' or the all-encompassing 'it's historical'[1] rhetorical device to either resist or reify a current or new practice/s. These claims to ways of doing are mobilised in the context of specific events. In DesignCo, for instance, the introduction and implementation of a new structure was met with both resistance and support by those who were threatened or benefited respectively.

To conclude, I have argued that 'culture' is not a single phenomenon with definable traits nor does it afford one meaning only. Like the notions of identity or nation (Chapter 2) culture is an abstract term. It is understood here as a co-constructed floating (empty) signifier (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001); a term that denotes a concept that exists in discursive abstractness devoid of set meaning and which becomes operationalised and substantialised exclusively in contextual relativity (Laclau, 1990). This raises significant theoretical and methodological issues (Chapter 4) on the interpretation of meaning. Different schools of thought have developed analytical tools over the years to handle this question and their empirical object of enquiry. This book has taken a practice approach to culture and situated the locus of the study on the 'event' in a Hymesian sense. Special attention has been paid to the business meeting (Chapter 7 and 8). Through the data I discussed how

employees negotiate ways of doing in their organisational setting as an ongoing practice and in constructing organisational roles and positions. The moment of interaction, the requirements of the event, the dominant ideologies, symbols, and the agency of the actors are constantly realigned and redefined. Sewell (1999: 48) usefully approaches culture as "the semiotic dimension of human social practice in general". From this point of view then, patterns emerge through a web of shared practices and meanings. This framing of the concept allows us to bring together the agency of the 'practice' and the prerequisites of the 'system'. It also provides a way beyond the binaries of the past on the relativity/realism of culture. The volume also argued that metacultural discourse offers an insight into powerful ideologies and resources for constructing self and other in the workplace. Metacultural discourse comes in different guises one of which is cultural difference talk. It is mobilised in the sense making process people put forward in organisational contexts. Dominant ideologies of cultural difference are representations which can reduce the complexity of practice. They also constitute resources that allow individuals to distance themselves from the power imbalance that is inherent in any setting and can mask issues of inequality and hegemony.

Overall, categorisations based on nationality and stereotypical representations of national behaviours are common in first order narratives of employees in most if not all the projects I have seen over the years. Culturalism is widely used to explain or attribute difference which in its turn is based on power and inequality (Piller, 2011). Bargiela-Chiappini convincingly argues (2009: 6) that "the 'cultural turn' in organisation studies has led to the manipulation of culture as an instrument of managerial control". Bargiela-Chiappini refers to the modern Post-Fordist Workplace and the essentialisation and regulation of behaviour which can be used to separate those who are like 'Us' to others who are deviant. It provides a vocabulary which paints a political issue in a neutral colour through the concepts of cultural disposition and cultural difference. Recent work in organisation studies (Koveshnikov et al., 2016) has convincingly shown how cultural stereotypes constitute powerful resources for manages to re-enact or resist power hierarchies in their context. Metacultural discourses are dynamic and can take different forms and functions depending on the context where they occur. They provide a resource for achieving individual and collective goals and as such will no doubt continue to proliferate in the business world.

Although culture and language research has followed its own epistemological journeys, it seems to me that debates on culture local/global as well as on cultural difference share similarities with the work of linguists on language, gender, and sexuality. Moving from looking for differences between the man/woman category to acknowledging variability within categories and engaging with issues of power and hegemony, the Language, Gender, and Sexuality (LGS) field has developed a set of theoretical and methodological tools for addressing the problem of structure and agency. By extension the objectivity/subjectivity of 'gender' vs. 'biological sex' also came under scrutiny. In line with the post-structuralist agenda, current work in LGS (e.g., Meyerhoff, 2013) makes a case for bringing together large

scale top–down quantitative analysis with a micro–analysis of local instantiations of variants. The value of multimethod and multilayered analysis is also convincingly argued as well as the significance of learning from the affordances and limitations of the different analytical approaches. The LGS theoretical and methodological apparatus could contribute to the ICC agenda and vice versa. Furthermore, research arguing on the politics of banal sexism and the difference between men and women can contribute to the critical ICC work and critical ICC work on the politics of cultural difference can feed into the agenda of LGS scholars. In both cases narratives of difference are still widespread in popular literature and everyday discourses. As well put in a blog by Deborah Cameron on popular literature perpetuating sexist stereotypes and its target audience:

> they [readers/buyers] [a]re looking for a story that confirms their beliefs about how men and women are different, and reassures them that men and women will always be different no matter how much feminists shout and scream. It's not about the science, it's about the politics.

Workplace narratives of difference (Chapter 4) where man/woman is replaced by nationality labels can and often do serve the very same function.

Further on methodological matters, synthesising across areas of enquiry in the linguistic domain can already move towards the current calls for inter/multidisciplinarity. In 2006 Bargiela-Chiappini convincingly argues for a multidisciplinary enquiry for Intercultural Business Discourse which can shed light to more layers of context and lead to the "collapse of the traditional levels of analysis" (2006: 8). A focus on practice in particular brings together interactional and critical tradition and can open the space for innovative work on probing further our understanding of culture and language at work. Moving away from the macro/micro divide, the challenge we face is to meaningfully look into the ~~bro~~ader socio–political and ideological realm and make clear connections with the situated moment of interaction.

This requires the study of practice (in the workplace) as in figure 9.1:

- *Discursively constructed/produced-consumed*,
- *Related to its material instantiation*,
- *A resource for achieving individual and team goals*,
- *~~Political-Ideological~~*,
- *Changing and evolving*,
- *Synchronic and ~~D~~iachronic*,
- *Socially shared – cannot exist outside a system of signification that is visible and meaningful to teams*.

In both the following and final sections, I engage further with issues of methodology and provide directions for further research.
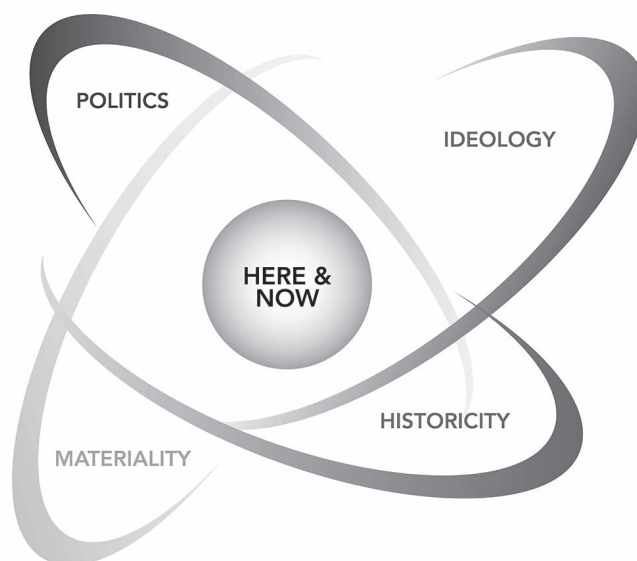
FIGURE 9.1   A visual representation of core research angles for the study of practice in
the workplace

9.1 Hymes and Gumperz's legacy and the multidisciplinary agenda for the study of workplace talk

"Each time that comes requires a change in perspective."
(S Hall from A Jaworski)

Hymes's work has shown the unbreakable bond between the situated encoun-
ter and social order. He states "from a communicative standpoint, judgments of
appropriateness may not be assignable to different spheres, as between the linguis-
tic and the cultural; certainly the spheres of the two will intersect" (1972: 286).
The interactional sociolinguistic (IS) tradition has also emphasised the importance
of the ethnographic detail for exploring the interpersonal and social structures
that become locally relevant and meaningful. IS is rarely used for addressing issues
pertinent to the wider socio–political context which however is not an inherent
limitation of the theoretical framework. To the contrary, Gumperz's emphasis on
the repercussions of miscommunication and interactional misalignment particu-
larly for the power/less in asymmetrical encounters is indicative of the interest on
power relations. Hence, the fact that IS has not been widely used for the analysis
of political interaction points more to the way IS, and associated methodologies,
have been used rather than the affordances of the theoretical framework per se. IS,
and the tools that have been developed over the years for the analysis of situated
interaction can complement other approaches to provide a "fully 'critical' account

of discourse" (Wodak and Meyer, 2001: 3). This requires both describing and theo-rising on "the social processes and structures which give rise to the production of a text, and of the social structures and processes within which individuals or groups as social historical subjects, create meanings in their interactions with texts" (Wodak and Meyer, 2001: 3).

In recent works (Angouri et al., 2017; Angouri and Wodak, in prep.) we make a case for combining IS with the Discourse Historical Approach. The DHA's theo-retical and analytical apparatus allows for analysing in detail and positioning a text within its wider socio–political and ideological contexts (Wodak, 2015), and IS provides an insight into the multiple layers of context that are mobilised and are made relevant in the situated speech event. We have argued that a combined DHA/IS frame can provide an agenda and toolkit for unpacking what the speakers do in context and also probe further the important aspects of embodiment and materi-ality that ~~have not, as yet, attracted enough attention~~ by workplace sociolinguists. We have shown in our work that a DHA/IS perspective can bring together the traditionally put micro/macro levels and then go beyond. The micro/macro ana-lytical divide has dominated the way we approach and talk about research analysis and findings. As argued earlier, though, using a micro/macro frame for organising phenomena and participants' realities is an analytical decision rather than inherent in the way people, including the researchers, think or act. The current move towards a holistic approach can balance the emphasis on one or the other as well as focusing on either the individual or the group. From this point of view, a multilayered meth-odology can bring together the different analytical layers and cross boundaries of the past and is in line with the current postmodern influence on research practice. Similarly, bringing together multiple datasets, as we saw here, allows to access more layers of context and approach the organisation from complementary perspectives.

The study of 'culture', broadly put, has gone through periods of academic 'wars' with the one between the essentialism/non–essentialism being, still, prominent in literature. This has been discussed in detail earlier (Chapter 2) along with the need to move to a more holistic approach that breaks traditional boundaries of the past. Looking into stability and change, hegemony and consensus, the pre–existent insti-tutional structure and agency of individual actors involved in business events as binaries limits the potential of moving the field and going into a more nuanced analysis of meaning making processes at work. This is not new, already in 1976 Stokes and Hewitt write: "If structural theorists have no way to account for the flexibility of action, given their cultural determinism, interactionists are left by their analysis with no real explanation of the massive fact that patterns of conduct persist over long periods of time" (1976: 841).

This book has not proposed a new grand theory. I align with those who suggest that the time is right to take stock of the affordances and limitations of the theories and methods that have served our field so well and to talk to cognate disciplines to compare tools and ways of carrying our empirical research. Stuart Hall's quote in the epigraph of this section was recently used in a talk by Jaworski (AILA, 2017)

on one of the most popular terms of the last decade, superdiversity (Chapter 3 and Vertovec, 2007; Coupland, 2016; Creese and Blackledge, 2018). Theories and methodologies never emerge in isolation. Instead, they develop in a dialogic relationship with other theories and wider paradigms, research trends and dominant discourses, as well as the social phenomena that are relevant. Mobility, language contact and change, linguistic penalty, and inequality have preoccupied linguists since the early days of the field. We do, however, witness the move towards a reorientation and redefinition of disciplines, fields, and areas of interest. The influence of postmodernism is felt across the spectrum of social sciences and the emphasis on multidisciplinarity provides fertile ground for probing further our theoretical and methodological tools. On this, a combined DHA/IS approach provides a frame for the study of 'culture' as and in (organisational shared) practice which, in my view, has a lot to offer beyond the realm of sociolinguistic enquiry (see also in Angouri and Wodak, in prep.). Following the earlier discussion on multidisciplinarity, obvious synergies between workplace discourse analysts and researchers in organisation studies and international business is a critical gap open for further research. Questions associated with the transient nature of work activities, and work spaces as well as the global im/mobilities and points of (dis)connect can only benefit from a joint linguistic and business approach (see Angouri and Piekkari, 2017). Needless to say, going out of one's comfort zone brings challenges; but as workplace discourse research has come of age, opening new areas for dialogue are mutually beneficial for bringing new light to old questions and raising new questions using established and well-tested conceptual and methodological tools.

9.2 Where to from here? Engaging with complexity and holistic enquiry

A number of times in the volume I used the term 'complex' and made a case for a holistic and critical approach to the study of workplace discourse. What exactly does this mean though. The adjective 'complex' is a widely used metaphor, at least in ICC work, in order to describe ~~a nexus of~~ interdependent groups of people, concepts, actions, and so on – often something that is evaluated as complicated. By using complicated and complex interchangeably however, the two notions are equated at the conceptual level. This imposes linearity on the latter and leads to a terminological lack of clarity which is not analytically or theoretically useful. Despite this, current work on complexity theory is growing and provides social sciences in general and workplace discourse in particular with opportunities for methodological innovation.

Following the development of thinking in social sciences, our understanding of the 'organisation' has also shifted from structuralism to post structuralism. Moving from: the organisation as a predetermined set of structures and an entity in the 60s to the organisation as a network and part of networks in the 80s and 90s to a fluid model in the turn of the century, the pattern seemed to be from simple > complicated > complex. The current understanding of the organisation as a complex

system highlights the significance of internal dynamics. As expressed by Marion and Uhl-Bien "in complex systems such as organizations, unpredictable (and sometimes unexplainable) internal dynamics will determine future conditions" (Marion and Uhl-Bien, 2001: 391).

The notion of complexity from a system perspective is dynamic and already well developed in a number of fields and areas. Already in the 60s work in systems engineering captures the multilayered and multidimensional nature of the part and the whole. Chestnut in a widely cited quote argues: "Each system is an integrated whole even though composed of diverse, specialised structures and sub-functions [. . .] any system has a number of objectives and that the balance between them may differ widely from system to system" (Chestnut, 1967: 36–37).

A number of other disciplines, notably in life sciences, mathematics, and physics contributed to the development of rich body of work which crossed disciplinary boundaries and started, relatively recently, influencing thinking in social sciences. Notions such as the butterfly effect (originally from chaos theory where, simply put, a small change in a non-linear system has seemingly disproportionate effects at a later stage) are used in everyday talk and media (see e.g., a recent piece on BBC describing changes to the UK National Health System (Triggle, 2014). Focusing particularly on the workplace as a complex system, the following notions are use-ful. A complex system cannot be reduced to the functions of one of its parts (Allen et al., 2011). For instance, a natural ecosystem goes beyond its various individual structures. In their turn, the structure/s are connected and affect the broader 'whole' and the whole is then adaptive to change. Similarly, an organisation is a part of the broader way of organising activity. Management scholarship has engaged with complexity theory and the growing number of publications shows the potential for theoretical developments in this field (Loorbach, 2010; Rotmans and Loor-bach, 2009). Complexity theory also attracted a considerable attention in the Social Sciences (Byrne and Callaghan, 2013; in language teaching (Atkinson, 2011), in Linguistics (Whiteside, 2013), in Applied Linguistics (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2006; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008), and in Geography (Welsh, 2014). In man-agement studies complex systems theory gained its popularity in 1990s due to its relation to organisations and strategy (Levy, 2000).

It has been adopted in Linguistics in the seminal research of Diane Larsen-Freeman (1997, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008) in SLA. Since the mid-90s, a number of researchers in Applied Linguistics have turned to complexity theory and ecological perspective in order to reposition the learning in second language acquisition research (Kramsch, 2011). Although there is clear common ground between complexity theory and recent sociolinguistic theories, there is little discus-sion on how the two interact, which is a fruitful area for future workplace discourse research to address.

Further to this, there is a growing number of studies taking an ecolinguistic perspective which in my view shows a tendency towards a holistic approach to study language in context. Van Lier's approach to language learning in context is well in line with applied, sociolinguistic, and anthropological studies of language in

that "context is central, it cannot be reduced, and it cannot be pushed aside or into the background" (Van Lier, 2002: 144). Although this has been the starting point of sociolinguistics – and workplace sociolinguistics is certainly a case in point – one cannot and should not argue that all non-formalist linguistic studies are taking an ecological/ecosystem perspective. Ethnography and particularly critical ethnography however is well placed to engage with the ecological frame.

Taking the ecosystem as a metaphor and an ideal for a holistic analysis is already growing in applied/sociolinguistic research and follows from Haugen who already in 1972 writes on "the study of interactions between any given language and its environment" (1972: 225). Using ecology as a metaphor however is not always analytically applicable as it raises a number of questions along the lines of where an ecosystem begins and ends or how the balance of the ecosystem is managed, by whom and for whom and so on. The current interest however indexes a quest to engage with theoretical paradigms that are well suited for the "study of a complex and messy reality" (Van Lier, 2002: 145). Well argued in Steffensen and Fill (2014), ecolinguistics is not one single church and it shouldn't be; it does bring together however a set of questions that have preoccupied linguists of different colours who would not necessarily self-identify with an ecolinguistic approach. As such it has the potential to offer a space for multidisciplinary inquiry and for looking into old questions with a new light.

Moving to other relevant recent work Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) identified five tenets of language as a dynamic system, which are "Relativity of Self and Other, Timescales, Emergentism, Unfinalizability, Fractals" (2008: 659–660). The discussion they provide foregrounds key issues postmodern sociolinguistic research has addressed such as the multiple identities that individuals mobilise in context, the embodied nature of interaction, and the porous as well as multiple boundaries between communities. Despite using different terminology the issues raised indicate a direction of travel which can be particularly useful for workplace discourse. Current studies by Workplace Sociolinguistics as well as researchers in Organisation Theory and International Management understand the organisation emergent in and through discourse/s. Emergence is critical in complexity theory in its "helping explain how system-level order spontaneously arises from the action and repeated interaction of lower level system components" (Chiles et al., 2004: 501). Although complexity theory is not widely adopted and adapted by workplace discourse analysts yet, understanding the interaction of different agents as an ongoing practice, which is systematic and at the same time unpredictable, echoes the well-known axiom shared by all discourse analysts on the constitutive power of discourse and unpredictability of interaction.

Further to this, approaching the organisation as a complex whole affords a way to theorise and analyse the coexistence of a) stability and fluidity b) the individual and collective, c) the interplay of global and local, and the d) multilingual ways of organising human activity. This forces the analyst to rethink and engage in dialogue on the suitability of the theoretical and methodological tools currently used by workplace scholars to capture the ways in which the dynamic nature of professional

practice is enacted in situ. Overall complexity seems to offer a new vocabulary to talk about stability and change, orders of analysis, and non-linearity in a technologically interconnected world.

Over the past ten years we have experienced many different turns in the literature: 'linguistic', 'discourse', 'materiality', 'practice', 'space', 'multimodality', 'visual', and the 'complexity' turn amongst many others no doubt. What exactly qualifies as a 'turn' and where we all turn has never been clear to me. However, what I believe *is* clear is that we can usefully turn our gaze to our own theoretical tools and their suitability as well as we turn to others, reaching out and attempting to transcend disciplinary boundaries. This is particularly relevant to workplace discourse analysts who have a lot to offer beyond the socio/linguistic domain.

Although a lot remains to be explored so that we don't end up with 'fit all' metaphor, the role of the researcher as 'bricoleur' allows engagement with complexity, power, and politics from a different angle. The concept of 'bricolage' (e.g., Eckert, 2004, 2008) puts emphasis on the agency of the speaker to combine, scrutinise, and construct meaning. This is also particularly suitable for the process of analysis and the researcher's identity in the multi or post-disciplinary era.

To sum up, I argued that culture talk at work is complex, dynamic, and political. The concepts of language, culture, and identity – *non plural* do have a lot of currency for lay people and this is something workplace discourse analysts cannot and must not lose sight of. A lot of our debates are matters of definition as Sewell argues: "Whether we call [. . .] partially coherent landscapes of meaning 'cultures' or something else – worlds of meaning, or ethnoscapes or hegemonies – seems to me relatively unimportant so long as we know that their boundedness is only relative and constantly shifting" (2005: 174). Although the field of workplace discourse has come of age a lot of work is still to be done; the concept of work is changing, disciplinary boundaries are collapsing, and our theoretical tools are under scrutiny. The concepts of 'culture' and 'cultural difference' are particularly visible in the business world and everyday life and are constantly redefined in our interconnected world. Hence they remain open to further investigation. By engaging in fruitful dialogue with others who are interested in similar questions we may perhaps access more layers of meaning and develop a better awareness of the ways in which shared practice is negotiated and metacultural discourse emerges and becomes relevant in daily life at work.

Note

1 I am indebted to my colleague Marina Paraskevaidi for the discussion of the historical in organisations.

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Transcription conventions:

All are pseudonyms. Line divisions are intended to support understanding and typi–
cally represent sense unit boundaries. There has been editing for ease of reading.

[	Left square brackets indicate a point of overlap onset.
]	Right square brackets indicate a point at which two overlapping utterances both end, where one ends while the other continues, or simultaneous moments in overlaps which continue.
=	Equal signs indicate continuous utterance with no break or pause and/or latch.
(.)	A dot in parentheses indicates a short pause.
[. . .]	Section of transcript omitted
~~?~~	~~Questioning intonation where not obvious on paper~~
<u>**emphasis**</u>	Underlining is used to indicate some form of stress or emphasis.
th–	Cut off word
(X.0)	Pause about X seconds
:	Sound stretching
(( ))	Notes
?	Questioning intonation
↑↓	The up and down arrows mark rises or falls in pitch.