Roles and Identities in Confrontational Interactions

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This English translation has not been published in printed form/Cette traduction anglaise n'a pas été publiée sous forme imprimée.

- 1 Everyone, as Erving Goffman remarks, has their own identity, biography and memories that accumulate as we journey through life. As we do so, each of us will lay claim to a multitude of capacities and functions. It is these capacities, professional, domestic and other, and which we express centre stage or in the wings, that Erving Goffman (1974: 136) calls our individual "role". The contributions presented here explore the textual roots of these ideas of role and identity, but they do so from a particular perspective that, drawing on well defined *corpora*, investigates the different ways in which role and identity are expressed, and simultaneously constructed, in discourse. These forms of discourse come in a variety of genres, written or oral, and in different cultural contexts: messages posted to discussion forums (French context: Doury, Lefébure), manifestos written by scientists and reactions to these in the form of articles, interviews and television debates (Dutch university context: Torck), scientific articles on the social sciences (Israeli context: Livnat), television debates (Czech television: Cmejrková), and television interviews (Israeli television: Weizman; Levi, Weizman, Schneebaum; and on Al-Jazira: Levi, Weizman, Schneebaum). It emerges, that they all have a more or less explicit confrontational aspect, defined *a priori* or not and always constructed during, and by, the interaction taking place. For example, the DUCSAI forum openly promotes public debate (Doury, Lefébure), while the publication and media coverage of manifestos encourage controversy and establish a confrontational *ethos* (Torck). Televised political interviews, which stand out for their use of challenge strategies, reflect and at the same

time discursively construct conflicts (real or faked, Weizman, 1998) around opinions and political positions, and also around social and discursive obligations and privileges (Cmejrková; Levi, Weizman, Schneebaum; Weizman). Finally, academic papers establish or support scientific positions while assuming others, actual or potential, with which they will come into conflict (Livnat). As we shall see, lying at the hub of these conflicts, and especially the political, scientific and public convictions and the stances taken in discourse, are the constituent elements of two kinds of roles - social and discursive. And this is one of the reasons why confrontational discourse lends itself so well to the analysis of roles and identities.

Roles or identities?

- 2 Can we really make a distinction between role and identity? As we have seen, Erving Goffman (1974: 137) seems to do so, by suggesting that a personal identity, or a person, should be seen as a whole of which the different roles are the constituent parts: "I believe it is preferable to speak about role only to refer to an aptitude or a function, whatever the context in which it appears; the term 'person' should refer to the subject of a biography [...]". Later, he would postulate the "person-role formula", specifying that "every time an individual takes part in an activity, we may distinguish what is called the person, the individual, who is the one taking part, from the role, which is the status or the function they assume during the interaction while remaining aware that the two are linked" (*ibid.*: 263).
- 3 The connotations suggested by his choice of words are clear. To Erving Goffman, we are not only dealing here with professional functions, since roles are also manifest in domestic, family, friendship and other contexts (when we refer to the role of the plumber, the father, the friend, the policeman, etc.). The idea of identity is less specific, and therefore less suited to textual analysis. It is characterised by "having found a certain direction in life" and by having "memories of the stages in life's journey" (Goffman, 1974: 136)¹. When conceived in this way, identity does not lend itself to textual analysis and, as we shall see, research on discourse analysis uses the term in a different sense.
- 4 While pursuing these sociological reflexions on role and status (see Linton, 1936; Parsons, 1951), and on *role-set* (Merton, 1957), Erving Goffman branched out by seeking to explore how these ideas function in one-to-one interactions. But it was not until the advent of research on discourse analysis (in the Francophone context), conversational analysis and pragmatics that their discursive aspects were brought to the fore (see for example the Puebla conference proceedings, to be published; Antaki, Widdicombe, 1998a; Weizman, 2006). At the same time a tendency emerged to substitute the term "role" with "identity", with no real change in substance. Conversational analysis refers to "*identity*" and "*category membership*" that are "*made relevant*" and which speakers will "*orient towards*" in and through the discourse (Antaki, Widdicombe, 1998b; Sacks, 1979; Schegloff, 1991, 1992); these are studied mainly in daily and institutionalised interactions. In the French discourse analysis school, the idea of the "language-related role" (Charaudeau, 1995) is replaced by the idea of "discursive identity" (Charaudeau, 2001; Lochard 2002). However, in the articles on "role" and "identity" in the *Dictionnaire d'analyse du discours* (Charaudeau, 2002a, 2002b), the two are employed simultaneously. In this issue, both terms are used but the choice of one or the other does not reproduce the distinction suggested by Erving Goffman.

- 5 Besides the theories described here, other conceptual links can be enlightening, for example with psychology. On this subject, Claude Chabrol raises the question of making links between different disciplinary approaches, especially between discourse analysis and social psychology, and puts forward an integrated interdisciplinary approach that is essential to the study of roles and identities.

Which roles, and which identities?

- 6 The textual approach to the study of roles and identities opens up a fruitful distinction between social and discursive roles (interactional, language-related), which are themselves divided into sub-categories. The importance of distinguishing between the two must not be underestimated, as shown by the numerous classifications that, using a whole series of technologies, clearly show the necessity of a dual approach. We will give two examples. In conversational analysis, Don Zimmerman (1998) observes that the identities towards which speakers tend bring contexts into the interaction that are differently centred: the *proximal context* for discursive identities and the *distal context* for social identities, which he calls *situated identities* or *institutional identities*, and which he considers to be the more stable of the two. In discourse analysis, Patrick Charaudeau describes the psycho-social identity as “external” and the discursive identity as “internal”. The social role (also called “social identity”) is of a sociological nature and based on the subject speaking in a legitimate capacity, while the language-related role (“discursive identity”) concerns the positions taken by a subject in the discourse and can be also be sub-divided, into speaking and communicating roles. According to the author, these two types of roles cannot be assessed outside a communication situation (Charaudeau, 1991, 1993, 1995, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Charaudeau, Croll, 1991; Croll, 1991). We should note that it is not necessarily easy to characterise a social role in relation to a discourse situation. Elda Weizman (2006) shows how, in a political interview, the social role of the “party leader” is implicitly decomposed into two components – the ideologue and the leader – and that it is the relevance of this division that is the hidden agenda of the interview.
- 7 Although there are more subtle distinctions, the basic difference is that the two types of roles are defined in relation to different norms. The social role is marked by the obligations that are imposed by the subject’s status, functions and activities, and by the privileges that go with them. The discursive role, however, is defined in relation to the norms that govern the way a discourse is conducted in a given context. The distinction is probably most likely with institutionalised discourse, as this is characterised by a pattern of discursive strategies that are conventionally determined *a priori*. And it is from this perspective that the television interviews are analysed here, especially in three contributions that take a pragmatic view, showing how out a mismatch tends to arise between the social role of an interviewee as a person with a particular status, and their discursive position, which is substantially affected by the obligations and privileges attributed to the interviewer who has to ensure that the interview is conducted in an acceptable manner. The fact that participants in a television interview are preoccupied by the two roles they have and that they explicitly refer to the fact is demonstrated by Svetla Cmejrková and by Elda Weizman. These two contributions, and those from Irit Levi, Elda Weizman and Isaac Schneebaum, also show how they negotiate this duality in more implicit ways. Three other contributions, drawing more on the theory of argumentation,

analyse institutionalised genres, exploring the argumentative strategies that are employed (Doury, Lefébure; Livnat; Torck) to establish the acceptability, authority and legitimacy of the arguments put forward, thereby asserting the speaker's *ïethos* - the construction of legitimacy being, as we know, a predominant trait of a social identity (Charaudeau, 2001). The analyses of the complex relationships between professional expertise (which is a constituent of the social role) and the mastery of textual norms (a constituent of the discursive role) confirm the importance of distinguishing between the two types of roles, all the more so if the possibility of a contradiction between the two should arise (Livnat, Torck).

On the research method

- 8 The question of method is essential, because the researcher has to be able to establish which of a speaker's multiple roles is involved in a given circumstance (Greatbatch, Dingwall, 1998: 121). As we remarked earlier, researchers in conversational analysis (see Sacks, 1979; Schegloff 1991, 1992) and their adepts insist on observing a *caveat*: identities can be explored only insofar as they are "made relevant" by the speakers, which in itself has consequences for the interaction. The studies presented here are not attached to the tradition of conversational analysis and only venture to address the components of the roles and identities "made relevant" to the participants in an interaction, and "made relevant" by them, explicitly or implicitly. For example, the femaleness of women interviewers (Cmejrková) is made relevant by male moderators through their presentation, characterisation, forms of address and the thematic orientation of a debate. Moreover, it is sometimes explicitly accentuated by both moderators and female interviewers. Elda Weizman argues that challenge strategies, especially forms of address - which often go together with other signs of challenge such as irony and indirect reprimands - accentuate the components of the roles being targeted, while Irit Levi, Elda Weizman and Isaac Schneebaum point to the way interviewers distribute meta-pragmatic remarks about the conduct of a discourse and about the rules of cooperation (Grice, 1975), to show that their purpose is to challenge the interviewees and thereby to bring out different components of their social and discursive roles. Marianne Doury and Pierre Lefébure suggest that the demarcation lines between the camps involved in the debate analysed are established by the discourse. It could be said, therefore, that by employing argumentative strategies such as legitimation and delegitimation, the negotiations between diverging interests and the argument of greater numbers and the collective identity of speakers tend towards traditional social positions associated with representative democracy rather than those associated with participatory democracy. In her analysis of controversies between academics, Danièle Torck shows how disqualification using processes such as arguments like *ad hominem*, *ad personam* and *ad consequentiam* bring out expectations as to the social *ethos* and the discursive *ethos* of academic experts, and explore the effects of weaknesses in argumentation and a limited mastery of discursive norms. Finally, Zohar Livnat explains how impersonal forms of address and the first person plural establish a distance between researchers and the research they report in their papers that helps to build up their credibility and scientific authority.

Conclusion

- 9 The focus here is thus on the discursive aspects of roles and identities. This means investigating the positions taken by speakers in relation to their arguments [thèses], to scientific results and to political stances, and also in relation to their partners in the discussion, while establishing the latter's and their own discursive and social positions by more or less explicit means. The research we have presented here is at the crossroads of disciplinary encounters, with a focus on the textual aspect – and our aim in doing so was to respond to Claude Chabrol's call to encourage complementary interdisciplinary studies that open up new spheres of experimental and intercultural exploration.
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NOTES

1. : We will not go here into a different meaning that E. Goffman (1963) attributed to “identity” in a different context, when comparing “personal identity” with “ego identity”.
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