

STRUCTURES AND STRATEGIES OF DISCOURSE AND PREJUDICE

Teun A. van Dijk
University of Amsterdam
The Netherlands

This chapter discusses some theoretical and methodological problems in the study of the relations between ethnic prejudice and its manifestation in discourse. The background to this discussion is a research program which deals with the reproduction of racism in discourse and communication, especially in the context of everyday conversation (Van Dijk, 1984, 1987a), news reports in the press (Van Dijk, 1983, 1988a) and textbooks (Van Dijk, 1987b). The basic assumption underlying this research program is that ethnic prejudices are acquired, shared and legitimated mainly through various kinds of discursive communication among members of the white dominant group. This assumption implies that systematic analyses of discourse about ethnic minorities may provide important insights into two fundamental aspects of racism. First, discourse analysis may tell us something about the content and structure of the cognitive representation of ethnic prejudice, as well as about the properties of their processing during speaking or writing. Secondly, such an analysis allows us to understand exactly how white group members persuasively convey such ethnic prejudices to other ingroup members in communicative interaction and how, thus, ethnic prejudice may spread and become shared within the dominant group.

The analysis of accounts of experiences of racism by black people shows that such characteristics of prejudice in communication hold not only within the ingroup, but also in interaction with minority group members (Essed, 1984, 1988).

Against this background, our study of the expression and communication of ethnic opinions in everyday conversation, based on interview data gathered in Amsterdam and San Diego, has shown that prejudiced white group members generally follow a communicative strategy with two, sometimes conflicting, goals. On the one hand, they positively present themselves as tolerant, non-racist citizens, whereas on the other hand they may (re)present ethnic minority groups in the neighborhood, city or country in negative terms. In this way, internalized social norms of non-discrimination appear to clash with negative personal experiences, or with more general negative attitudes about minorities. In order to resolve what may be both a moral conflict and a practical interaction problem, speakers have recourse to various tactical moves. Such moves typically pair negative remarks about 'foreigners' with assertions which may deny, explain, or otherwise legitimize such negative remarks or their underlying opinions: "I am not a racist but,..."

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study of the expression and communication of ethnic prejudices is complex and interdisciplinary, and will only be summarized here (for details, see Van Dijk, 1987a). Extending the traditional analysis in terms of attitudes to outgroups (Allport, 1954), we analyze ethnic prejudice as a specific type of social cognition, as a negative social representation of ethnic minority groups shared by members of the dominant white group. Such an analysis does not merely specify the content and schematic organization of these social representations, but also their strategic application in ethnic situations (Hamilton, 1981). Prejudice does not consist of the beliefs of individual people, but of generalized opinions shared by people as group members (Tajfel, 1981). This presupposes that prejudice is acquired, used or changed in social situations, and as a function of structures of social dominance. The concrete manifestations of this generalized group prejudice, for instance in individual acts of discrimination, are, however, controlled by so-called

'models' (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; Van Dijk, 1985b). These models are mental representations of personal experiences, for instance, interactions with ethnic minority group members. Under the biasing influence of more general and abstract group representations, members of the dominant group thus build or update ethnic situation models. This may happen in everyday perception or interaction, but also indirectly, through discourse and communication about ethnic events.

Models are organized in a fixed schema, consisting of categories people use to analyze and understand social situations, e.g., Setting (Time, Location, Circumstances), Participants and Event or Action. The propositions stored under these categories characterize not only the personal knowledge people have about a situation, but also subjective, evaluative beliefs, that is, particular opinions. Part of the knowledge and opinions represented in these personal models are instantiations of generalized knowledge scripts, and of (prejudiced) attitudes, respectively. In other words, general group prejudice is tailored to concrete, personal situations through such models. This also explains the familiar finding that everyday talk or action regarding minority groups does not always show ethnic prejudice: Other knowledge or opinions, for instance about the context of, interaction or communication, as well as group norms and values, such as tolerance and respect for other people, may effectively block the expression or enactment of such general group prejudice. Thus, whereas shared group representations explain consensus, coherence, and continuity in prejudiced actions of dominant groups, models allow us to explain personal differences and situation specific variation.

One of the typical properties of ethnic information processing is that models of concrete situations are often constructed largely from specific applications of the prejudiced social representations, and not by the information derived from an analysis of a situation with ingroup members as participants. Otherwise neutral events or actions may thus be represented in a biased way, as in the familiar example of the black man sitting on a bench in the park, who may be seen as being lazy instead of enjoying a well-deserved rest from hard work. Conversely, one or a few experiences involving a 'foreigner', once represented negatively in a model, may easily be generalized into a more permanent negative opinion.

Apart from this generalization of models, prejudiced attitudes about outgroups may also be constructed by copying directly prejudiced opinions from existing attitudes about other ethnic groups. This was the case, for instance, for the new immigrant group of Tamil refugees in the Netherlands, in early 1985, of whom the population at large had virtually no experience, and hence no models. Soon, however, the Tamils were attributed properties that were already dominant in prejudices about other minority groups in the country, e.g. "They all want to live off welfare". It is also suggested that talk about minorities is controlled by such ethnic models. This means that biases in the model may also show up in conversation. This is typically the case in stories which white people tell about what they interpret as negative experiences with minority group members. Sometimes, however, for instance in argumentation, such speakers may also express the prejudiced attitude in a more direct way, for instance as generalizations (e.g., "Foreigners are criminals", "Foreigners are favored in housing").

Both model-based and attitude-based statements may, in turn, be controlled by general norms and values, which are also shared group representations. They tell people what they may or should (not) say in specific situations. Again, these general norms and values need to be translated into concrete guidelines for actual (verbal) interaction, and therefore must be specified, in so-called 'context models'. Unlike the models we have discussed above, these models do not represent the situation or events people talk or hear about, but the communicative situation in which they are participating. Context models contain information about, e.g. speaker, listener, speech acts and goals. It is this context model that monitors the well-known strategies of impression management or face-keeping. Thus, whereas the situation model of an ethnic event may give rise to negative statements about ethnic group members, the normatively controlled context model of a particular conversation may sometimes block such negative talk, mitigate it, or otherwise transform it into a socially acceptable form. It is thus that ambivalent, but strategically effective expressions, such as "I have nothing against foreigners, but...", arise.

INTERVIEWS AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS VS. OTHER METHODS

There are a number of ways in which the non-directive interview

and its systematic (discourse) analysis differ from most other forms of experimental testing or field methods of opinion elicitation (see e.g. Hyman, 1975; Plummer, 1983; Spradley, 1979). Conversations in general, but also non-directive interviews, are a more 'natural' way for speakers to express their opinions than responses to pre-formulated questions or the accomplishment of most experimental tasks. Speakers are allowed to specify, explain, correct, or otherwise detail their answers to questions, and may even challenge the presuppositions of leading questions by the interviewer. They may engage in spontaneous expressions of opinion and tend to volunteer arguments or 'evidence', for instance stories about personal experiences, that will make their opinions appear more defensible. At the same time, such informal conversations enable interviewers to disguise their goals, bring up specific topics in a more casual way, or follow special strategies in the elicitation of personal opinions. The same is true in conversations or non-directed interviews on ethnic topics. Although social norms may influence what is being said about minority groups, ethnic opinion will usually manifest itself anyway, if only in an indirect or implicit way. Dialogues have many levels at which such opinions may be expressed, and therefore also be assessed in analysis, for instance in the subtleties of turn taking, semantic moves and presuppositions, lexical choice, syntactic word order, intonation or rhetorical operations, at the local level, or in topic selection and change, and the schematic structures of storytelling or argumentation, at the global level. Some of these characteristics of conversation are not normally under a speaker's control, and may therefore allow more direct inferences about underlying cognitions to be made.

Although some experiments allow unobtrusive assessment of ethnic prejudice, such measurements are only rough approximations of the actual content and structure of prejudice. Systematic analysis of interviews or protocols allows a much more detailed study of the propositional content and organization of underlying cognitions. Ethnic opinions which may be explicitly denied at one point in conversation, may be presupposed or otherwise implicitly expressed or signalled at other points. Repairs, hesitations or pauses may signal doubt or interference with norms, and their analysis may suggest when speakers have recourse to face-keeping strategies. Data from non-directive interviews may sometimes appear to be contradictory, vague or incomplete when compared to forced responses in experi-

ments or questionnaire interviewing and may seem to prohibit precise assessments of underlying cognitions. However, such characteristics of conversation may indeed reflect similar contradictions, vagueness or incompleteness in cognitive representation and processing, including internalized social constraints on the formulation or expression of specific opinions. At the same time, apparent contradictions, both in conversation and in the cognitive representations they manifest, may be made coherent or be resolved at higher levels, involving, for instance, the formulation of different perspectives or points of view of the same event. Adequate discourse analysis can, in principle, handle such complex discursive manifestations of underlying opinions, which usually do not appear in directive interviews or questionnaire responses, and which are seldom analyzed in controlled laboratory experiments.

PROPERTIES OF DISCOURSE PRODUCTION

Against the background of the general observations made above, we may now discuss in somewhat more detail how discourse structure may be related to the structure of the social cognitions that define ethnic prejudice. Some of these relations may be defined in terms of a theory of discourse production. Although a full-fledged theory of discourse production does not yet exist, its major features are similar to those found in the extensive research on text comprehension (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). An important property of information processing in general, and of discourse comprehension and production in particular, is its strategic nature. For discourse production this means that meanings, words, sentences and various text structures are not generated systematically and precisely according to grammatical or textual rules. Rather, cognitive processing takes place at various levels at the same time, following effective heuristic methods, and using sometimes incomplete information from the current communicative context and from active models, scripts or attitudes represented in memory. Unlike the formal generation of grammatical sentences or well-formed textual structures, this strategic process, especially in spontaneous conversation, receives continuous feedback from the context, other ongoing processes, or representations, and features corrections, trial and error, repairs, reformulations and hesitations.

The overall goal of this mainly unconscious process is to effectively accomplish several things at the same time: the online production of meaningful grammatical utterances, the production of relevant conversational turns, and the accomplishment of speech acts or other social acts, including the communication of information and, ultimately, the (trans)formation of models in the listener. When the speaker has sufficient knowledge of the communicative context, including the actual beliefs and goals of the listener, a provisional production plan may be set up, featuring tentative speech act intentions and relevant 'content' to be conveyed.

The information that is utilized in these strategic processes of production is drawn from various sources. The major source for the 'contents' of the utterance is the current model, representing the event or situation the speaker is talking about. Selected propositions from this model are transformed into locally and globally coherent semantic representations of sentences and texts. The second source is the current context model, which represents the actual goals of the speech participants and other features of verbal interaction. This information will be used for the production of relevant speech acts, for instance an assertion, request or promise. At the same time, thirdly, more general information from relevant knowledge scripts or frames is activated and selectively applied to feed both the situation and context models with necessary inferences. Part of this general knowledge pertains to the structures of sentences and discourse, and provides the rules and special constraints for linguistic production and social interaction. Finally, general attitudes are similarly applied to provide specific evaluative beliefs (opinions) for the situation and context models. These opinions will, for instance, control style, e.g. the selection of specific evaluative words, or the production of specific forms of intonation.

Actual production involves a formulation process which consists of the online production of sequences realizing word, sentence or text forms. These forms embody the strategic expression of underlying semantic representations, signal intended speech acts, and manifest underlying opinions or emotions of the speaker.

It is assumed that all these processes can be effectively coordinated only if they are monitored by a central 'Control System'. This system has many functions in the effective flow of information between

short and long term memory, it keeps track of the models or scripts that are activated, allocates processing time to specific sub-processes, represents the current topic or macroproposition of the text under production, as well as the main features of the current context of communication, and generally coordinates the strategies operating at different levels of production.

COGNITIVE ORGANIZATION AND ITS MANIFESTATION IN DISCOURSE

These highly simplified fundamental assumptions about discourse production are also relevant for the expression of social cognitions such as prejudices. We assume that such prejudices appear in two ways in memory; as general group attitude schemata, stored in semantic or 'social' memory, on the one hand, and as specific situation models, stored in episodic memory, on the other.

Conversations about ethnic minorities may display this dual source. On the one hand, we find formulations of model-based personal experiences, viz., as personal stories. These models not only feature a necessarily subjective, if not biased, representation of earlier events, but also particular opinions, in narrative statements such as "The Turkish family next door makes a lot of noise". On the other hand, we find 'direct' formulations of general knowledge and opinions derived from scripts and attitude schemata, for instance in generic statements like "Foreigners take our houses", or "Turks do not want to learn our language". We find such general opinions in many places of interviews about minorities, for instance in argumentations or in conclusions of stories. These different types of expression in discourse, narrative statements in the past tense versus generic statements in the present tense, suggest a first structural link between discourse structures and the organization of cognitive representations.

However, this simplified picture of the reflection of the cognitive organization of prejudice in discourse obviously needs to be detailed. First, it is highly unlikely that all general propositions expressed by speakers appear 'ready-made' in the scripts or attitudes in social memory. That is, speakers may also express 'new' general propositions. This means that, during production, the expression of general knowledge or beliefs is submitted to an inde-

pendent process of transformation. General information, like any other information, will be adapted to the requirements of the current communicative context, and may therefore be changed in many ways. Thus, what is generally known or believed about 'foreigners' may be applied to 'Turks' or 'Tamils', even though such information had not previously been stored as such. Hence, we may assume that substitution transformations occur.

Secondly, general statements may also be derived from existing knowledge or attitude propositions by plausible (not logical) inference. If it is believed that "most Surinamese are on welfare", that "many Surinamese drive big cars and dress well", then the general opinion may be derived that "Surinamese get money from illegal sources". This inference may be checked and found consistent with prejudiced opinions about the illegal activities of Surinamese and then admitted to the production process.

Thirdly, general information may appear indirectly by instantiation, that is, the substitution of schema variables by individual constants, e.g., 'Surinamese' by 'our Surinamese neighbors'. Such instantiations are made during model construction or retrieval. This means that, besides representations of actual experiences, speakers may very well express concrete versions of general prejudice opinions, e.g., "Our Surinamese neighbors are on welfare, but have a big car. So they must cheat on welfare and make money illegally". Such propositions may already be resident in the model of the speaker about these neighbors, but may also be locally produced ("come to think of it ...") in specific communicative contexts. These instantiations may lead to particular inferences, which in turn may be generalized as an opinion about the whole group. Thus, the well-known notion of 'generalization' may be explained as general proposition formation in attitude schemata on the basis of a single situation model.

If this analysis is correct, it follows that when general opinions about minorities are expressed in discourse, there does not seem to be an obvious way to establish, for a given speaker, whether these opinion statements are direct formulations of general attitude propositions, whether they have been obtained by various 'on line' transformations, for instance by inference from general prejudices, or whether they are expressions of new generalized model opinions.

There are ways to disentangle these different sources, however. First, general opinions in social memory must have widespread and effective applicability, possibly in a variety of contexts. Cognitive economy will tend to keep general knowledge and attitude schemata as simple as possible: Information that can be inferred from other general information will thus tend to be left out of the schema, unless it is often used in processing. Second, opinion schemata are basically derived from two sources, that is, through abstraction and generalization from models (own experiences, or experiences heard or read about), and directly through communication with other ingroup members or through the mass media. This means that consensual, shared general opinions which are relevant in many communicative contexts and in several kinds of personal experiences (models) tend to be favored in attitude schemata. This may be called the social relevance or functionality principle in the construction of prejudices and of social attitudes in general.

To test these assumptions, comparisons with other interviews and knowledge of public and media discussions about minorities will provide clues about which propositions in an interview are likely to be derived (after possible transformations) from prejudiced opinions in general attitudes, and which are more specific inferences, which may be personal opinions (stored in models) and/or locally produced in the present context. For instance, in one of the stories we analyzed (Van Dijk, 1984), a woman concludes that "Turkish men bring flowers for the doctor, and not for their own wives when these are in hospital". It is highly unlikely that such a specific generalization was previously stored, in contrast to another generalization she makes: "They do not adapt to our rules". Conversational structure will also provide hints about the source and nature of generalized opinions, for instance when a generalization is accompanied by hesitations, false starts or repairs. Finally, ready-made general opinions often have identical formulations, which suggests that they were acquired through communication with other ingroup members rather than through inferences from particular models of personal experiences.

The same reasoning may be applied to the assessment of more specific prejudiced opinions. These are typically stored in, or derived from, models of experience, and will therefore tend to appear in stories about such experiences. Formally, they will be distinguished by

names and identifying expressions (instead of variables or generics), by narrative tenses (mostly the past tense), and the semantic categories that also characterize models (time, place, participants, actions, etc.).

We see that there are several properties of discourse which may be considered plausible signals of the mental organization and processing of prejudiced information.

VALIDATION PROBLEMS

Whereas the discussion thus far merely makes plausible guesses about the overall sources and organization of ethnic prejudice and their manifestation in discourse, it still does not show whether specific statements of fact or opinion in interviews may be interpreted as expressions of existing cognitions. In traditional methodological terms, a psychologist may wonder about the validity of the interviews: Do prejudiced statements and their structure express underlying prejudice and its structure, and does the absence of such statements signal that speakers do *not* have a prejudice? In other words, how reliable is such an analysis of prejudiced discourse?

The answer to such questions is complex, and involves many theoretical, methodological and even philosophical assumptions. Before we go into the details of the discourse analysis of ethnic prejudice, let us consider a few general issues. First, assume that a speaker *S* tells outright lies. For instance, he hates his Turkish neighbor and tells the interviewer that he thinks his Turkish neighbor is “a terrific guy”. This, or more subtle, versions of positive self-presentation may occur, but we generally have no way of establishing ‘true’ opinions in field research, and the same holds in experimental laboratory research. However, especially for extended, non-directive interviews, there are reasons to reject this form of methodological doubt. In interviews such lies would not be isolated. To say the opposite of what one actually knows or believes would require coherent continuation and strategic support, for instance evidence to show why the Turkish neighbor is such a nice guy. Also, such opinions must show consistency with other beliefs about foreigners. In other words, the whole interview in that case should be based on an extensive, locally produced ‘fiction’. It is possible that such cases exist, but very few

speakers would be able to coherently and consistently sustain such a fiction in a long interview. Therefore, we find it more plausible to assume that, up to a point, speakers in interviews try to tell the truth, even if this will generally be their truth.

In other words, if S hates his Turkish neighbor or Turkish people in general, these opinions will somehow also transpire in talk. It is likely that this will happen more overtly in socially less monitored talk with close friends and family members. However, even with colleagues, relative strangers in public places or, similarly, with interviewers in interviews, such opinions will usually be expressed, either spontaneously or after relevant questioning or priming. However, we suggested that this will take place in an account of *their* version of the truth. That is, negative opinions tend to be mitigated, so as to avoid negative attributions by the interviewer (e.g., “He must be a racist”). This is indeed the case. The analysis of more than 170 interviews, conducted in San Diego and Amsterdam, consistently shows that strong opinions, which may be inferred from other characteristics of conversation, are often formulated in mitigated terms, usually in understatements or similar rhetorical operations, for instance, “Well, I was not particularly crazy about him... “.

Negative evaluations will often be backed up, either by further arguments in an argumentation structure, or by evidence from models of experience in stories. Such argumentative or narrative support is mainly geared towards the justification of negative opinions, which also contributes to the avoidance of negative attributions by the hearer. In other words, majority group members may have negative opinions about minorities, and will usually show such opinions, but have strategic means to make such opinions appear legitimate or justified.

These strategies of positive self-presentation involve many different moves, such as denials (“I have nothing against them, but...”), affirmations of exceptions (“You also have good ones among them”), or transfer (“I don’t mind, but my neighbors do”). It may be the case that, when taken in isolation, some of these statements may not be (quite) true. That is, speakers saying these things actually *do* “have something against them”. This becomes obvious when we analyze such statements in context. First, they are mostly followed by *but*, which shows that there may be exceptions to the general statement.

Secondly, it is this exception which is extensively argued for, or supported by narrative. According to our theoretical model of discourse production, this means that the model features negative opinions. If these are consistent, for the speaker, with general opinions about minorities, then the experience is seen to confirm such general opinions. In that case, it is plausible to assume that the denial of a general negative opinion is indeed a form of positive self-presentation.

If, however, a specific negative opinion, formed on the basis of an unpleasant experience, is indeed inconsistent with (neutral or positive) general opinions about minorities, storytellers will show this in different ways. In the first place, they will avoid telling negative stories about minorities, possibly because they do not spontaneously remember them, because positive attitudes do not facilitate retrieval of negative stories, or else, such negative opinions may not be found relevant for the conversation: Non-prejudiced speakers do not need to make the overall point that they have nothing against foreigners. Rather, such speakers will want to show that their experiences with foreigners have generally been positive. This hypothesis appears to be supported by our interview data. People who may be assumed, on other grounds, to be less prejudiced, not only make positive statements, but spontaneously back these up with stories about pleasant experiences or good relationships with minority neighbors or colleagues on the job. Even when some negative experience does come up, such people will sometimes show at length that this is an exception, or will attribute the experience to other circumstances, and not to properties of minorities as a group. In other words, both positive and negative statements about minorities appear in crucially different discourse structures, depending on whether they are expressed by more or by less prejudiced people.

Thus, positive or negative opinions are seldom expressed alone. There are many rules and structures for discourse and conversation, as well as those for acceptable interaction, which require such statements to be supported, embedded, or explained. It is this complex structure that shows whether or not speakers have prejudiced opinions about minorities. This means that even when something positive or negative is said about an (exceptional) minority person in one part of the interview, other parts of the interview may show that this opinion is indeed dealt with as an exception to the rule.

On the other hand, when prejudiced persons make face-saving positive statements about minorities, or deny being prejudiced against them, they should not simply be assumed to be lying. This may be explained as follows. First, such statements may express general norms or values that the speakers may support in general (Billig, 1988). They thereby show that they respect the basic norms of society, and that therefore they see themselves as normal, that is, non-racist citizens. For them, negative opinions expressed about minorities are not inconsistent with this self-image, simply because a legitimate complaint is not seen as evidence of a racist attitude. Indeed, to resent assumed abuse of social welfare is in agreement with other norms and values of society, so if it is observed or believed that some foreigners do indulge in such abuse, it is found legitimate to have negative opinions about this. Even the (unjustified) generalization from such negative models of experience may be thought to hold if selective evidence may be produced which supports such claims. The media, or communication with others, may be mentioned as such support, even if sometimes prefaced by the strategic statement "We may of course not generalize, but...". It is the task of a cognitively oriented discourse analysis to reconstruct this biased version of reality, by relating opinions expressed in interviews to other underlying opinions, norms and values.

These observations suggest that there is considerable theoretical and methodological evidence to take interview discourse at face value. Despite many due to communicative and interaction strategy goals, we assume that accounts of experiences, as well as general statements, do indeed reflect what speakers actually think. However, statements cannot be interpreted in isolation. Only the complex structure of the discourse can be related to the structures and strategies of cognitive representations and their processing. Therefore, we will show in a last section, in somewhat more detail how such discourse structures and strategies may be interpreted as empirical evidence for cognitive structures and strategies.

STRUCTURES AND STRATEGIES OF DISCOURSE AND PREJUDICE

It was assumed above that the theoretical distinction between prejudiced attitude schemata and prejudiced models may also be observed in discourse, for instance in different discourse structures

or genres, such as stories and argumentations. The next step in establishing this correspondence between talk and thought is a further analysis of more detailed structures of attitude schemata and models and a comparison with possible correlates in discourse, or vice versa.

Structures of prejudice

In our theoretical framework, attitudes are defined as hierarchical structures in semantic (social) memory, consisting of general, evaluative beliefs, that is, general opinions (see also Abelson, 1976). In that perspective, prejudices were taken to be negative attitudes shared by members of a dominant group about a dominated out-group (Allport, 1954). This does not mean that each opinion in such a structure is negative, but that the higher-level, controlling macro-propositions are negative. For effective storage, access and retrieval, opinions in prejudiced attitudes are organized by labeled nodes, or categories, such as Origin, Appearance, Cultural characteristics or Personal features. These semantic categories organize opinions in similar domains of experience or observation. Together, these categories form a hierarchical schema, in such a way that the general opinions which may be inserted in their 'slots' also show different hierarchical positions. For instance, the proposition "Minorities are criminal" is more specific than the overall macroproposition "Minorities have negative character traits", but more general than the lower level proposition "Minorities are involved in the drug business", which again is more general than the prejudiced opinion "Surinamese men are often drug pushers". The same is true for the organization of opinions about origin, appearance, cultural habits ("They do not speak our language", or socio-economic competition ("They take our jobs", "They take our houses").

The formation, acquisition, and application of ethnic attitudes is partly determined by such organizing categories, which may be assumed to form a fixed 'prejudice schema'. Hierarchical structures of this schema facilitate fast access to high level opinions. Categorization of opinions allows selective addressing and retrieval of specific opinions, e.g. those of competition, or even those of competition in housing. Such selections may be structural or ad hoc (contextual). Typically, people who are especially concerned with competition in employment, e.g. because they are unemployed, or because

they have minority competitors or superiors on the job, will tend to focus on this category. They may even form or transform their attitude schema in such a way that such a category may be placed at a higher level, and become more important than negative opinions about, e.g. different appearance. In other words, the prejudice schema formed by these categories also defines what information about minorities is most relevant for different subgroups of the dominant group.

This assumption also allows flexible integration of the theory with a theory of class or dominant white group factions: Different experience and different social position lead to differently organized ethnic prejudice, and partly to different prejudice content. This important dimension of prejudice structures and their (trans) formation will not, however, be further discussed here, and belongs to the (much needed) sociological component of a theory of social cognition (see also Van Dijk, 1988b).

Prominence in discourse

The structures of prejudice as postulated above will, at least in part, also show in behavior, and hence also in communication and conversation. In simple terms, a first hypothesis would run as follows: What is prominent in the prejudice structure will also tend to be prominent in speech. That is, all other things being equal, people prefer to speak about what they have on their minds. This principle, which is related to fundamental principles of memory search and retrieval, and which is often studied in terms of 'availability', also has consequences for discourse structure and communication.

Thus, when people are asked, for instance, about their neighborhood, the question will first trigger and retrieve high level knowledge and beliefs about the neighborhood. Very common in our inner city interviews, for instance, is the general opinion that 'the neighborhood is run down', or that 'they do not like it'. A following why-question by the interviewer, or spontaneous follow-up of the interviewee, will then trigger high level reasons, as represented in the model people have about their neighborhood. Often, such reasons will feature concepts such as 'foreigners' or 'immigration' as a major element in attribution and explanation. This is also the case in the 'fundamental attribution error' in the explanation of actions of out-

group members (Pettigrew, 1979). Whereas failure of self or ingroup members tends to be attributed to circumstances beyond our control rather than to personal characteristics, the opposite is the case for negatively valued actions of minority groups. That is, minorities are often personally blamed for structural inequalities in society of which they are victims: Instead of miserable educational facilities, their 'lack of motivation' is seen as the major cause for educational 'underachievement'. Similarly, in our example, the combination of concepts or propositions featuring 'neighborhood', 'run down', 'crime' or 'housing' will tend to trigger high level information in the 'personal characteristics' category of the prejudice schema about foreigners, rather than structural factors of urban decay in other scripts or attitudes. In other words, the ordering of explanatory topics spontaneously brought up in conversation gives us clues about the hierarchical and categorial organization of prejudice schemata and models, as well as about the perspective of the speaker in the establishment of causality (see also Taylor & Fiske, 1978).

Note that this assumption does not beg the question: We do not simply assume that prejudiced opinions are prominent because they are prominent in discourse, and then conclude that prominence of prejudice leads to prominence in discourse. This correspondence is independently established on theoretical grounds, such as the principles of search and retrieval or cognitive organization. Similarly, the correspondence may also be corroborated by other discourse structures: Prominence may also be signalled by the length of, or the amount of detail in stories, as well as by speed of response, or lack of search pauses. Data from other research (experiments, surveys), and especially significant convergence of the discourse structures of different interviewees, may provide further independent evidence for this correspondence between discourse structure and prejudice. When asked a general question, respondents very seldom begin with a specific story. They first produce general statements, which in turn may trigger more specific models of personal experience. Cognitive strategies in this case may be similar to, and even determine, conversational ones relating to topic introduction, level of description, and topic shifts.

Models and stories

In similar ways, we may try to find discursive evidence for the

structure and content of mental models. We have repeatedly suggested that models tend to be expressed as stories: Models represent situated, personal experiences, featuring specific Time, Place, Circumstances, Participants and Actions (for details, see Van Dijk, 1985b). These categories of model schemas may appear in semantic representations of propositions and their syntactic expressions in sentences (Dik, 1978). Secondly, these categories also appear in the conventional structural categories of stories (Labov, 1972).

Our field work has shown that stories about minorities have rather a homogeneous structure and content. Firstly, they are usually embedded in argumentations. They are not primarily told to amuse the hearer, but to make a point, to provide evidence for a general opinion. This opinion statement usually precedes or follows the story and is explicitly linked to it. This characteristic of storytelling in the interviews may be interpreted in cognitive terms by saying that models are primarily triggered, retrieved and actualized as a function of general opinions, that is as an 'illustration' or 'proof' of credibility or legitimacy.

Secondly, the Orientation category of these stories tells us something about the nature of the models in which ethnic minorities tend to appear as participants: They are descriptions of mundane everyday activities, in which the storyteller or another protagonist is 'simply going about his/her daily business'; shopping, taking a walk, or working. Cognitively, this suggests a model structure in which an innocent I is represented, and contrasted with the guilty villain (the foreigner). Expressed innocence and mundanity also have a narrative function: It makes the following Complication category of the story more prominent, exceptional and unexpected. Similarly, the contrast between innocent speakers, represented as victims, and foreign villains is, of course, also an important narrative strategy to persuade in order to enhance credibility and get sympathy from the hearer. This cognitive structure is consistent with more general prejudiced opinions, in which the ingroup is represented as the victim of immigration, and the outgroup as people who violate 'our' norms, habits, safety, privileges, and even the routines of our everyday life. Thus, general attitude structure may guide the organization of specific model structures, which in turn will appear in specific story structures.

Next, most Complications in stories are about negative actions of minority group members (assaults, stealing, everyday nuisance and harassment, dirtiness, cheating, etc.). Note that, in principle, an infinite number of specific stories may be told about minorities. This is not the case, however. Such stories have a very limited topical repertoire. Most actions described in these stories are instantiations of general, prejudiced opinions. That is, the stories of personal experiences may be about personal experiences, but the storytellers select surprisingly similar experiences to relate, and these happen to be very close to the stories read or heard about in the media, or in everyday conversation. In other words, there are not only cognitive stereotypes (attitudes and models), but also narrative ones, which through further conversation may of course contribute to similar models in other group members.

Unlike other stories, these stories often do not have a Resolution category. Again, this is in line with what may be predicted from the underlying model structures: Resolutions usually feature heroic, courageous or lucky acts of protagonists, defeat of opponents, or solution of a problem. For prejudiced speakers, none of these can be the case. Because they see and represent themselves as victims, and not as heroes, the villains continue to be a problem for them. In other words, there is no solution to what they see as the foreigner problem, and this is probably also how ethnic situations are represented in their models. Despite the formal constraints of narrative structure, storytellers therefore will tend to omit the Resolution category. They tell what may be called a 'complaint story, which focuses on the Complication rather than on the Resolution.

Finally, the Evaluation category of these stories may be interpreted as the expression of the opinions represented in ethnic situation models, whereas the Coda or Conclusion category, usually expressed in sentences with verbs in the present tense, exhibit either current plans of the speakers ("I won't go out at night anymore") or more general ethnic opinions that the story aimed to illustrate or prove (e.g., "You can't trust them").

Other discourse structures

Other structures of discourse may also be related to cognitive representations and strategies of prejudice. Our analyses of a large num-

ber of interviews have suggested the following links, which will be summarized in a few points.

1. Semantic structures realize communicatively relevant fragments of both models and general prejudices. These represent in discourse what people think about minorities and ethnic relations. Semantic analysis, however, should be made relative to the overall meaning structures of the interview, not of propositions in isolation. Conceptually, these are organized in a few basic categories: Difference (of appearance, culture and behavior), Deviance (of norms and values, e.g. in crime), and Competition (for space, housing, jobs, education and welfare). Along another dimension, these semantic structures may also be summarized in terms of the notion of (perceived) Threat.
2. Propositional structures of sentences, as well as their syntactic formulation, for instance in the description of action, reflect the underlying perspective or point of view, as represented in model structures. In this way, agents responsible for negative actions, viz., minority group members, tend to be given a prominent, initial position, that is, as syntactic subjects (“They deal in drugs”). In this way their agency and responsibility is made more prominent than if they had been mentioned in the downgraded prepositional phrases of passive sentences (“Drugs are sold by them”), or if they had been left out completely (“There is a lot of drug dealing going on”). This is particularly the case in written language, for instance that of the media (Fowler, et al., 1979; Van Dijk, 1988a).
3. We have seen that prejudiced discourse often features disclaimers of various types, e.g. mitigations, denials and apparent concessions. The analysis of these semantic or rhetorical moves is also relevant in relating discourse structures and cognitive structures. The general pattern of these disclaimers, viz. ‘A, BUT B’, where A is a positive self-description and B a negative other-description, suggests possible conflicts between the content of situation models on the one hand, and context models on the other. This conflict is both interactionally and cognitively resolved by having recourse to such face-saving moves, thus realizing essential steps in the overall strategy of impression management. More specifically, this suggests how norms and values, embodied in the representation of self in the context model, control which information

from the situation model must be selected or modified in talk. Hence, disclaimers or other semantic moves may be analyzed as signals of underlying socio-cognitive conflicts, and their strategic resolution, when prejudiced people discuss a delicate topic such as foreigners (see also Billig, 1988; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; 1988).

4. The stylistic level of lexical choice and syntactic variation does not directly express specific cognitive content, but signals perspective and opinion, as well as social constraints of the communicative situation, such as the degree of formality or familiarity of language use, and the status or group membership of the speech partners. In prejudiced descriptions of minorities, for instance, we witness a general reluctance to use names as identifying expressions, a preference for excessive pronominalization and the use of demonstratives (“they”, “those people”). Such expressions may be interpreted as signalling social distance, and therefore also exhibit some of the characteristics of the models people have about themselves and their relations with minority groups and their members.
5. Rhetorical structures are typically oriented to the communicative context. They serve persuasive functions, i.e. to emphasize specific content, points of view or opinions. Such communicative functions not only express the underlying structures of communicative situation models, e.g., what the speaker thinks about the hearer, but also what is most relevant, important or otherwise remarkable for the speaker. Thus, the opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’, prevalent in both models and attitudes, may rhetorically be enhanced by contrast, as in “we always work hard, and they can have nice parties every week”.
6. Finally, specific conversational properties of spontaneous speech, such as turn-taking moves, repairs, false starts, pauses, or variations in intonation, stress or volume, not only have interactional functions, (for instance of face keeping, credibility enhancement or persuasion), but they may also signal subtle properties of cognitive operations during discourse production. Thus, search and retrieval of relevant models and attitudes and their contents, the construction of semantic representations, the selection of appropriate lexical items and the final formulation in grammatical structures all require complex strategic operations. Positive self-

presentation imposes a high level of self-monitoring, which will lead to heightened control of exactly what is said, and how it is said, especially with delicate topics such as race relations. This will probably cause more pauses, false starts, repairs and similar manifestations of the cognitive strategies of optimal expression of meaning (see also Levelt, 1983). We have found, for instance, that not only do prejudiced people tend to make prominent use of referential expressions which denote ethnic minorities, but they also often pause, hesitate or make false starts as soon as they must name or describe minority groups or their members. It seems likely that these surface phenomena signal the speakers' awareness that the choice of the 'correct' term is important in naming ethnic minority groups.

CONCLUSIONS

The fact that non-directive interviewing is a powerful methodological instrument in the social sciences, has been demonstrated in many earlier studies which emphasize the importance of personal accounts of people's experiences and opinions (Harre & Secord, 1972). When such accounts are given by members of a dominant group, and deal with their relationships with a dominated group, they may often be expected to be self-serving, biased or even prejudiced. Our work on the reproduction of racism in discourse, and in particular our analyses of interviews which resemble informal everyday conversation, suggests that such accounts provide crucial data, which cannot be gathered by other methods.

From a sociological point of view, the question of the validity or reliability of such subjective accounts, when compared to what people really think or what really happened in the episodes talked about, may be less relevant than the question of how people actually and observably go about the mundane but delicate task of talking about minorities. Also, whatever such speakers, as group members, actually think, it is what they tell others which is relevant for the expression of ingroup membership, for intra-group communication, for the construction of an ethnic consensus and for the confirmation of group position in a multi-ethnic society.

From the point of view of social psychology, however, the analysis

provides important insights into the representations and strategies involved in ethnic prejudice. Besides the usual experimental methods and the field surveys which attempt to assess the contents and the relevance of ethnic prejudice, such accounts yield very rich data for a study of the social cognitions of ingroup members in the study of intergroup relations.

Our research suggests that there are multiple links between the content, structures and strategies of such cognitions, on the one hand, and those of the discourses that express them, on the other. Despite many types of transformation, to be accounted for in theoretical terms of discourse production and within the perspective of rules and other constraints of social interaction, discourse in many ways shows what goes on in the minds of people. In contrast to brief responses in structured interviews or questionnaires or to the often unnatural tasks in laboratory experiments, non-directive interviews provide an optimal way of eliciting experiences and opinions of a delicate nature. We have suggested that, in such a complex context of communication, people will not, or even cannot, consistently dissimulate about their experiences or opinions. Given the occasion to speak their minds about what they see as their problem, they will also give their version of the truth.

Against this methodological and theoretical background, we are able to engage in a systematic study of both ends of the relationship: We may search for the expression in discourse of postulated structures or strategies of the social cognitions of prejudice and, conversely, we may try to explain typical and recurrent features of talk about minorities in terms of the structure of ethnic opinions. It is important, however, that such an analysis goes beyond the traditional methods of superficial content analysis, or even of those of contemporary protocol analysis in psychology. A highly sophisticated and subtle discourse analysis is necessary to trace and describe the many ways in which dominant group members show their underlying opinions (see the contributions in Van Dijk, 1985a, for further theory and analytic methods).

A brief summary of some research results has shown that such discourse analyses are viable and yield multiple new insights into both prejudiced talk and prejudiced opinions. Thus, argumentation structures can be linked with general attitude schemata, stories with

episodic model structures of personal experiences, thematic structures with high-level hierarchical propositions of both models and attitudes, and local semantic moves with both the conflicting goals of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, goals which are represented in the underlying model of the communicative situation. Similarly, semantic structures of propositions, as well as their syntactic expressions, may signal a point of view on ethnic events, whereas lexical style will invariably manifest both communicative constraints and opinions. Rhetorical and conversational structures function within the interactional context, for instance in order to heighten credibility and enhance persuasive impact, but also show subtle underlying structures (e.g., the opposition between 'us' and 'them'). Similarly, they signal some details of production processes which are difficult to assess with other methods, as is the case for pauses, hesitations, false starts and repairs, which may be related to search, retrieval and cognitive decision procedures during the formulation of descriptions and opinions on delicate subjects in the most appropriate way.

We see that discourse analysis, as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry and with a set of highly sophisticated methods, may in principle contribute new insights and open up new directions of research in the social psychological study of ethnic prejudice and the reproduction of racism in society. In order to gain an insight into the social cognitions of dominant group members, and provided that we use a serious theoretical and analytical approach to such personal and social accounts, we may indeed follow the elementary principle "Why not ask them?"

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.