

# Chapter 1

## Media, Policy and Interaction: Introduction

Richard Fitzgerald and William Housley

The rise and prominence of studies of discourse reflects the importance now being given to understanding communication practices as part of and in relation to a range of social processes. One of the crucial institutions central to societal communication that lies betwixt and between the state, the market and the individual is the news media. And one of the central activities of the news media within democratic social forms is to hold elected officials and government to account. As a consequence of this conceptualization of the public sub-constitutional role of the news media social scientists, and discourse analysts in particular, have focused on the news media as a means of exploring the relations between language, policy communication, political accountability and public(s) (cf Chilton and Schäffner 2002).<sup>1</sup>

At one level the study of the social through language, or discourse, has developed an acute sensitivity to the political dimensions of language and power and the way language represents and shapes understandings of the world (Fairclough 1995, 2003, Van Dijk 1988, Wodak 2009). At another level an attention to the detailed methods participants use in order to conduct their talk-in-interaction has contributed to a reconsideration of traditional socio-political categories such as race, class, gender and social identity as members' phenomena irredeemably embedded in social action and language use (Sacks 1974, 1995, Garfinkel 1967, 2002, Button 1991, Hester and Housley 2002). A concern with members' practices and the accomplishment, use and display of socio-political categories within talk-in-interaction is of increasing interest to those pursuing ethnomethodological and related forms of analysis. The analysis of media practices in relation to policy debate, situated mediated political practices and communication provides an avenue of enquiry along which this increasing interest has found empirical resonance. The chapters in this collection represent cutting edge analyses of mediated socio-political practices built, as they are, upon members' methods of practical reasoning and interaction. The focus on language and talk-in-interaction provides a lens through which the relationship between members' methods and mediated political performance and practice can be understood.

Analyses of politics and the 'public sphere' in relation to rationality and communication are connected with Habermasian conceptualizations of the

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<sup>1</sup> See also the journals *Discourse and Society*, *Discourse Studies*, *Discourse and Communication*, *Language and Politics*, and *Text and Talk*.

social. It is fair to say many of the concerns with politics and the public sphere are framed within notions of communicative rationality, ideal speech situations and distorted communication (Habermas 1989). In recent years these ideas have informed debates surrounding the public sphere and the media as its relationship with political processes has grown more distinct to the point that it has become an integral feature of political process and communication in developed and developing societies. It is also of relevance where matters pertaining to the truth, policy debate and accountability are routine concerns for the emerging mediated public sphere. In this collection we have aimed to gather and present work by an internationally diverse set of scholars who respecify these concerns through the examination of language as social action.

### **Analysing Language, Media and Political Debate**

The chapters in this collection represent an examination of the discursive relationship between the public and policy articulated in and through mediated forms of public space. In a general sense the analyses that follow explore the organization and presentation of policy in the public sphere and in particular the language, interaction and discourse practices of policy makers, politicians and other 'public agents' when engaged in explanation, defence or promotion of 'public matters' within and through the media. In this the collection represents a departure from treating the analysis of public policy at the level of government programs by focusing on the situated practices of policy presentation and discussion as part of a *mediated* public sphere. The focus, then, is on examining the lived negotiated detail of policy work within a communicative domain which increasingly makes use of a range of 'access' technologies (e.g. open letters, interactive TV debates, phone-ins, e-mail, blogs and social networking sites) in constituting public debate in relation to policy and news management.

As suggested earlier, at the heart of this collection is an interest in language use within the mediated political realm. This interest can be found at the core of all the chapters in this collection, although the particular direction this takes in each differs according to various analytic traditions and the social political context(s) of data. In exploring the relationship between language, discourse and policy, the authors select various methodological frames through which to trace the interconnected levels of relevance for both immediate participants and overhearing or temporally related audiences. For some, the level of analysis focuses on the interactional process by exploring the intersection of media language and public policy, whilst at the other end of the spectrum the level of analysis explores the ideological role of the media in framing and generating public attention in relation to government policy. Between these two analytic foci the papers frame and explore different levels of analysis that, whilst grounded in the interactional details of the media event, reveal and connect different levels of the socio-political and ideological contexts in which the policy exists and of which the policy is inexorably a part.

The focus on the interactional details of mediated events where policy debate or communication is salient means that many of the papers begin their analysis by drawing on ethnomethodologically informed methods such as conversation analysis (CA) and membership categorization analysis (MCA). These two methods can be understood as providing a way to explore the *in situ* orientation of the participants to the local contingencies of interaction whilst at the same time anchoring the socio-political levels of analysis within a particular mediated version of the interaction order. Through these locally focused approaches the analysis of further levels of discourse are then grounded within the management of the interaction as a negotiated accomplishment of the 'policy work' (e.g. communication, explanation, presentation and discussion of proposals/effects) in which the participants are engaged. In this way attention to the detail of language use *in situ*, and particularly the way language is hearably designed for an audience, underpins the connection between language and the wider social and political environment in which it is cast. Given the centrality of the methodologies of conversation analysis and membership category analysis for many of the chapters presented in this collection it is useful to provide an introduction to these methods.

### **Conversation Analysis and Membership Categorization Analysis**

Both CA and MCA derive from Harvey Sacks' (1974, 1995) groundbreaking work examining everyday language and talk. Both of these approaches are grounded in the lived interactional detail of talk and interaction with the focus of CA on the sequential unfolding of interaction and the focus of MCA on the way people display their understanding of the social world around them. Since Sacks' early work CA has gone on to develop a prominent place within the analysis of language use, particularly in the analysis of institutional interaction (cf Arminen 2005). Prominent among these studies are those that have used CA as a means of highlighting the fine-grained sequential management of turn taking, the allocation of speech rights and topic change within broadcast contexts (Greatbatch 1988, 2001, Clayman and Heritage 2002, Hutchby 2006). MCA, whilst for many years a neglected area of Sacks' work, has recently developed a growing body of research and interest and is now an established ethnomethodological approach for examining practical methods of socio-cultural categorization work in relation to the local accomplishment of social organization and social order (Garfinkel 2002). The methodological approach first discussed by Sacks (1974, 1995), and developed by subsequent authors (Jayyusi 1984, Watson 1997, Hester and Eglin 1997, Housley and Fitzgerald 2002, 2009, Fitzgerald and Housley 2002, Housley 2000, 2002), provides a fine-grained analytic method for exploring the way members accomplish their interaction and display their knowledge of the world through the complex but methodical organization of social categories, devices and predicates mapped onto categories.

Whilst these two methodologies developed at different paces, and have at times been seen as separate enterprises, work to bring the two methods back together has increased through recognition that sequential and categorial work are mutually and inextricably entwined features within the ongoing flow of interaction. The combinational analysis of category work as part of the unfolding sequential management of interaction has since provided a rich seam of empirical observation through which to understand multiple layers of interaction (Fitzgerald and Housley 2002, Housley and Fitzgerald 2002, 2009, Benwell and Stokoe 2006, Fitzgerald, Housley and Butler 2009).

The routine mutual work of social knowledge in sequence is highlighted by Sacks's (1974) now famous example of the child's story 'The baby cried. The mummy picked it up'. The power of the descriptive apparatus upon which Sacks embarks is grounded in the basic idea that we have no problem making sense of the story as being about a mummy picking up her baby in response to her baby crying. Sacks locates the understanding of the story through the hearer recognising the social categories 'baby' and 'mummy' as related or tied to each other through the organizational device 'family'. Through this commonsense recognition procedure a set of expectable attributes (predicates) may be associated with the categories (that is, babies cry, mothers comfort their children) and linked together within the organizational device 'family'. This constitutes the actions as not only expected but also directed at each other, that is, *this* baby's crying is for *its* mother and the mummy's action is *expected* because the baby is crying. Thus, the way we hear this story is that it is the mother of the baby who picks up the baby and she does so because her baby is crying, when in fact no such necessary connection is explicit in the sentences. That is to say, we make sense of the sequence of the actions in the story through applying our commonsense knowledge about the way social categories act and interact to render the story intelligible. Thus this basic frame of members' categorization practices, together with a number of commonsense rules of application, work as practical registers that reinforce the observed or described actions of social categories where such categories are collected within occasioned organizational devices and which form a major part of the commonsensical framework of members' methods and recognizable capacities of practical sense-making.

### **Analysing Interaction, Policy and Debate**

Whilst the analysis of media and political interaction through CA work has had significant impact on understanding the way political interviews and debates are managed through various media, only recently has attention turned to the topic of politics as a focus of analysis. In these initial studies, and continued in this volume, the focus is shifted to examining the use of sequential, categorial and discursive devices and practices in the presentation of policy and political debate within the media/political sphere as well as public/citizen engagement though public access

media formats (Fitzgerald and Housley 2006, Housley and Fitzgerald 2001, 2003a,b, 2007, Leudar and Nekvapil 2000, 2007, Ekström and Johansson 2008).

For many of the authors in this collection a combination of MCA/CA together with other methodological approaches are utilized as a way of relating the fine-tuned analysis of the local interactional detail with an approach that addresses wider social knowledge. The combination of methods allows the authors to explore the detailed workings of social categorization as a mediated aspect of the wider political discourse and socio-political environment of which it is part and which it addresses. Indeed, as the chapters in this collection make clear, the discussion of public policy and the organization of political debate within democratic contexts trade on identifying and appealing to categories of population for support or appeal.

The strength of the analytic frames adopted are revealed in the way the deployment of social categories and category use in the immediate contingencies of persuasion are negotiated through a matter of timing, opportunity and relevance. In this way the actual content of 'politicized' devices organized around national, religious and ethical/moral 'logics' are seen as indexical to the particular circumstances and context of their use. For it is in the construction of these devices on the ground through methods of inclusion and exclusion of various categories that the political argument is made, heard and reported. These devices are always created *in situ* as the work of assembling the categories, and the work to which these categories and devices are put, are managed within the immediate and local context of their use. This indexicality of language use is central to the analytic detail within this collection but with an appreciation that the local work of categorization is *designed* for a wider political environment. As such, whilst garnering support or advocating for or against a particular policy, debating a future action or stirring up trouble is irredeemably achieved through local action, this action is not isolated or private but, as knowingly public, reveals a wider strategic purpose which is both observable through the local dynamics of the situation, the media event in which it exists and the wider political context in which it operates.

### **The Contributions in this Collection**

The strength of this collection is in bringing together different political contexts, public policy issues and media practice but where the problem is in many respects the same – exploring the actual detail of political and media interaction and its relation to the wider media political and social environment. With this context in mind we now turn our attention to the contributions to this collection.

In Chapter 2, the editors William Housley and Richard Fitzgerald examine the way identity categories, predicates and configurations are used in accomplishing policy debate in participatory frameworks. Through this discussion a focus on the immediate and micro-character of activities, such as those found in a radio phone-in and political interview, are seen to provide a powerful apparatus through which senses of democratic exchange and the promotion of specific views and contested

issues can be realized. Using MCA and CA the authors argue that the display of popular opinions as found in callers' comments on radio phone-ins, or the questioning of an interviewer on behalf of the electorate, public, or people 'out there' often use the form of personalized categorial encounters which provide a powerful moral ordering of the topic and local debate. In this way Housley and Fitzgerald demonstrate how interviews, phone-ins and the like represent a form of interactional and discursive machinery through which accountability is popularly heard to be enacted and realized and policy debate organized, managed and displayed.

In the next chapter Alain Bovet explores an aspect of participatory democracy in Switzerland where citizens have the right to initiate or modify public policy by raising enough signatures to trigger a national vote. However, as Bovet demonstrates in his analysis of televised debates prior to a vote taking place, the media orientation to 'for' and 'against' positions serves to create an over simplified prism around the debate through which subtle issues and positions are not available. Through an analysis that combines MCA and CA Bovet initially highlights the work that on screen captions do in creating a binary frame through which panel members are allocated to either 'side' of debate. This not only serves to allocate positions to those involved in the debate but also through use of biographical information prior to the debate provides a categorial frame by which topic identity drawn upon is predicated with credibility within the debate. However, rather than this being a result of media influence or preference, Bovet demonstrates that it is the very structuring of the issue around a 'for' or 'against' vote that shapes the media debate, and the way the debate is conducted. Thus, any subtlety or sophistication of the argument and the possible positions or opinions available around an issue are instead constrained by the two meta-categories of an omni-relevant reductive relational device; namely 'for' or 'against'. What the discussion highlights, and which is further fleshed out in other discussions in the collection, is the way category work is both essential to political and policy discussions but also how this constrains and influences the workings of political processes.

In the next chapter Emo Gotsbachner examines a political debate in Austria using MCA and CA to detail interactive moves and identity work that enables the speakers to position themselves within and as part of an interpretive frame from which to conduct their argument. By examining interpretive frames through their communicative structure Gotsbachner highlights the production and comprehension of discourse through its 'recognizability', through the routine standardized deployment of words, phrases, sentences and stereotyped images, sources of information that when used provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements. Within this interpretive frame the work of identity is seen as crucial as it provides access, legitimation and credibility to the speaker. Whilst initially highlighting the interactional work of establishing a credible identity through self categorization it is the categorization of others which is shown to be a key element in establishing, maintaining and defending a credible position within

an adversarial debate. In this Gotsbachner reveals a high degree of dexterity by which speakers are able to interpret local interactional events as representative of the presence or absence of predicates of political value such as trust, honesty and credibility.

Using a similar set of methodological tools Hanna Rautajoki develops an analysis of the closings of two Finnish TV debates dedicated to discussing the possible use of military force by the US against Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks. The analysis focuses on the closing round of answers by panel members as they are invited by the hosts to consider the implications of future action. Rautajoki's analysis highlights the way the closing question serves to bring together and draw a line under the preceding debate and move to the 'future' through considered speculation of possible action and consequences. Rautajoki highlights the way the panellists orientate to the creation of a moral device 'us'. This moral device draws upon an 'omni-relevant' device of national membership, to which the audience are assumed members of and through which taken for granted predicates are expressed through notions of recognizable 'national' characteristics as a way of navigating and constituting stances towards particular political and foreign policy matters. As becomes evident throughout this collection the relationship engendered between social categories and their related predicates serves an important function in political debate which is no more evident than through the various appeals to the collective 'we' device through which particular rights and responsibilities are predicated. The power of an inclusive 'we' allows the speaker to envelop or include themselves within the 'we' group and thus be able to claim speaking rights on behalf of the category. In Rautajoki's discussion the invocation of 'shared values' is used to predicate shared moral opinions and assumptions about how *future* events are to be interpreted.

In the next chapter Johanna Rendle-Short examines the use of shared values and inclusive predicates through the work that goes into categorizing sections of the population through appeals to national 'mythic' predicates. Using CA and drawing from a number of Australian radio and TV interviews the discussion explores the way Australian politicians use media interviews to advance their argument through the creation of, invocation of and appeal to 'communities' invoked around audience and population. Whilst dividing an 'audience' for political purpose is a theme throughout this collection the analysis highlights the way those appeals are made through an interpretive frame of 'mateship' and 'a fair go'. For Rendle-Short the appeal to various political constituencies is operationalized through the generation of a sense of community that possesses certain predicates through which the political spokesperson then aligns themselves to. The preference for radio talkback programmes and radio interviews has been a mainstay of Australian politics, finding its zenith during John Howard's premiership for its direct and intimate address to particular audiences. However, rather than this being a one-way process the analysis demonstrates the mutual dependency of the politician and host through the possessive reference of the listeners (through descriptions such as '*your* listeners', '*your* audience', 'voters who are listening to *you*'), though

pointing out that the host addresses an audience whilst the politician addresses a constituency.

In the next chapter Patrick Watson and Christian Greiffenhagen shift the focus from media debates to the process of policy news gathering by press gallery journalists. Through an ethnomethodologically informed ethnography combined with CA and MCA Watson and Greiffenhagen examine the ‘press scrum’ in which short exchanges of question and answer sequences provide the raw material for later broadcast or publication. Examining the information gathering process prior to broadcast the authors reveal the collaborative work by journalists; where rather than the encounter being a competitive free for all with journalists competing for scoops or exclusives there is a high degree of collaboration throughout the event. This is manifest in a number of ways such as questions being collaboratively managed and answers treated as being ‘for everyone’, as well as an orientation to local technological considerations and medium-specific materials. As the authors point out, the collaborative work engaged in by and within the press scrum where policy is questioned is not for an overhearing audience – rather this process stands prior to any particular medium (e.g. TV or Radio) or the political leanings of the specific news organ.

The way events are framed and policies presented through such framing is central to the discussion by Marián Sloboda in his examination of Belarus news where he highlights the work of categorizing a national population in support of a national policy. In this case, rather than the political and media discourse creating opposing sides around a policy by drawing on omni-relevant predicates of national characteristics as explored by Rautajoki (this volume), Sloboda explores how category work serves to create the ‘other side’ of the debate as being outside the country and in opposition to national policy. Using MCA and CA methods of analysis the author explores the way in which the news presenter introduces various interviewees who appear ‘on cue’ as relevant categories in support for government action. Thus, rather than the interviewees representing or offering contrasting positions around a topic or issue with the host acting as mediator, as discussed in many of the chapters examining political debates in this collection, the outside reports create a position from which the opposing or counter argument is located outside of the national ‘community’, and with vested interests to do so. In highlighting the idealized yet ambiguous democratic accountable role of the media in Belarus and other countries Sloboda’s analysis raises some interesting questions around the wider processes within and through which policy is addressed through the media. Whilst the role of the media as facilitating democratic accountability is shown as a rhetorical device in Sloboda’s chapter it is not of course confined to his case study. Rather, the media in this and other countries is shown to use various techniques by which to present opinions – or the context from which those opinions are presented – from within or as part of a particular (moral) frame.

An examination of moral accountability in politics is explored by Baudouin Dupret, Enriqué Klaus and Jean-Noël Ferrié through following the progress of a political scandal arising initially from a comment by the Egyptian Minister of

Culture in a newspaper article suggesting the headscarf worn by some women was 'regressive'. The authors construct a dialogic network (Nekvapil and Leudar 2002) by which to trace the evolution of the scandal through its interconnected manifestations published in media and parliament discussions. The evolution of the story is explored through different levels of analysis beginning with an examination of the way the scandal is initially constructed within parliament, through the generalizing process by which the Minister's personal life is then brought to bear on his public role, to the wider political context in which 'reputation' is then judged against competence and fitness to carry out public service. Through tracing the scandal through its dialogic network of mutual interdependence of media and politics the authors highlight the trajectory of the scandal and in doing so relate this to understanding the anatomy of scandals.

Susan Bridges and Brendan Bartlett continue with the theme of education policy as well as the technique of invoking a moral device of 'good' and 'bad' teachers in their analysis of a policy by the Hong Kong Government to improve professional standards of teachers. Focusing on an open letter to all teachers the discussion explores the policy data through three levels of analysis; the social and historical context of the document, the language and organization of the content of the document, and finally the ideological power revealed through lexical choice. In doing this the authors explore the way membership category work is used within the letter to invoke a moral imperative to accept the ideas behind the policy and act accordingly.

Sue Thomas's chapter also draws from the Australian media to examine the construction of a 'problem' by the media and allocation of 'responsibility' for that problem prior to government policy formation. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Thomas highlights the way policies around teaching and education exist in a highly politicized policy arena where the categories of 'good' and 'bad' teaching and teachers are infused with morally inflected ideology. In her discussion, Thomas examines a series of newspaper articles and commentary leading up to and against a background of proposed government policy concerning the need to equip teachers through on going development of professional standards. Focusing on one particular Australian newspaper, *The Australian*, Thomas traces the discussion of and around education policy and the proliferation of news articles on education policy in the run up to a government policy conference. Through this the discussion highlights the way the media created a discursive context by which policy discussions could be framed. In some ways the analysis resembles a number of discussions within the collection that highlight the creation of simplified binary opposition through which the opposing position is to be interpreted as ideologically informed (as opposed to the newspaper and its readers' position) and thus any objection can be dismissed as reactionary and obstructionist in relation to the future discussion of education policy.

What becomes clear from the varied discussions in this collection is that whilst the studies draw from different types of analysis a concern with language practices and categorization, albeit within sequential, dialogical, moral and ideological

frames, is central to understanding media, interaction, policy and debate. While polls may be invoked, or statistics relayed and discussed, the primary means through which policy debate and talk is accomplished and presented are grounded in mundane methods of lay reasoning. This collection demonstrates the way in which such reasoning is articulated and presented in political discourse and the mutually constitutive relationship between culture, discourse and interaction as a dynamic and fluid entity through which categorizations of self, identity, claims-making and normative assessments are routinely employed during, and as an essential resource for, policy debate.

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