

1 Identity: Interaction and Community

Identity is who and what you are. But while this is a simple enough statement to make, how we experience and manage our sense of self is far more complex. This is because we tend to see ourselves as unique individuals with a ‘true’, stable identity locked away deep inside us, yet we also recognise that our behaviours, affiliations and even our ways of talking shift through encounters with different people, often creating tensions and conflicts. Added to this there is also a range of different ways of theorising identity, each producing a different definition and way of approaching it. The current centrality of the concept of identity in the human and social sciences, in fact, suggests something of this slipperiness. So for some observers identity is what unifies our experience and brings continuity to our lives; for others it is something fragile and fragmented, vulnerable to the dislocations of globalisation and post-industrial capitalism.

There is, however, general agreement on the idea that there are various forms of identity that people recognise, and so identity involves *identification*. In identifying myself as a man, for example, I am identifying myself with a broader category of ‘men’, or at least some aspects of that category. At the same time, or more often at other times, I may be identifying myself as a vegetarian, a hiker or a son. No one has only one identity, and for a subset of the population, an important aspect of who they are relates to their participation in academic disciplines: they are physicists, historians or applied linguists. These different identities have to be managed because they impact on each other rather than simply add to each other, so the way I enact an identity as a teacher is influenced by my identity as middle-aged, British and so on. This book explores what academic identity means: how it is constructed by individuals appropriating and shaping the discourses which link them to their disciplines.

This chapter reviews some of the work on identity to set out a view which argues for the importance of interaction and community in identity performance, but I want to begin by presenting some key ideas up front.

1.1 Connecting *disciplines* and *identities*

The link between disciplines and identities might not seem immediately obvious. After all, things generally get done in universities without thinking too much about what our activities mean for the way we see ourselves. We go along to meetings, seminars or lectures and write essays or papers with a good enough working sense of who we are and who the others in our lives are, and they in turn seem to relate to us in the same way. People are generally accustomed to seeing themselves as having a nature and an identity which exist prior to their participation in social groups and the roles and relations they establish in these groups. Such a view implies that a discipline is just an aggregate of individuals, something distinct and independent from the people who comprise it.

Identity and other people

A very different view sees identity not as belonging *within* the individual person but *between* persons and *within* social relations; as constituted socially and historically (Vygotsky, 1978). Identity is not the *state* of being a particular person but a *process*, something which is assembled and changed over time through our interactions with others. Here the self is formed and developed within the structures of understandings, allegiances and identifications which membership of social groups, including disciplines, involves. It emerges from a mutual engagement with others in ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991), the ‘ways of doing things, ways of thinking, ways of talking, beliefs, values and power relations’ (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 464).

This kind of mutual engagement in community activities is accomplished every day in universities, of course, as in this example from an undergraduate biology tutorial, where a tutor leads a group of students over an extended interaction to construct shared understandings through shared language.

(1)

T: okay you take D-N-ase, mkey that kills D-N-A. and if D-N-ase wipes out the D-N-A do you see transformation occurring?

S1: no

T: no. what about protease that kills the protein?

S2: it still transforms

T: mkey. still transforms, and therefore what did, Avery conclude?

S2: the D-N-A was the uh,

S1: transforming agent

T: mkay, D-N-A is the transforming principle and not protein.

(MICASE: DIS175JU081)

Building on one another's turns, repeating the same words, overlapping and interrupting, the tutor guides the students to the conclusion of the transforming principle as a shared account. By participating in interactions such as this, students learn the practices and beliefs of a discipline. They slowly take on its discourses and understandings to construct a self which gains recognition and reinforcement through use of these discourses. In other words, learning to use recognised and valued patterns of language not only demonstrates competence in a field, but also displays affinity and connection. Identity in this sense therefore refers to 'the ways that people display who they are to each other' (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 6) so that *who we are*, or rather *who we present ourselves to be*, is an outcome of how we routinely and repeatedly engage in interactions with others on an everyday basis.

The view taken here therefore frames identity as an ongoing project as opposed to a fixed product and has little to say about any underlying core dispositions. It does, however, draw attention to the importance of language, which is central to our interactions with others and our participation in communities. Seeing identity as constructed by both the texts we engage in and the linguistic choices we make relocates it from the private to the public sphere, and from hidden processes of cognition to its social construction in discourse. Our preferred patterns of language, in both writing and speech, index who we are in much the same way that our clothes and body language index our social class, occupation and age group, making the study of discourse a legitimate means of gaining insights into self-representation. Analysis of disciplinary discourses can therefore complement existing approaches to understanding identity as discursively constructed by revealing something of how they function to articulate the relationship between the self and the world.

1.2 Identity and interaction

Current post-structuralist theories are deeply suspicious of the durable, unitary notion of identity summed up in Descartes' aphorism 'I think therefore I am.' While a consciousness of self may provide the basis for the sense that we are the same person from one day to the next, it is also true that identifying ourselves and others involves meaning – and meaning involves interaction.

Agreeing, arguing, comparing, negotiating and cooperating are part and parcel of identity construction, so identities must be seen as *social* identities. Cameron puts this view succinctly:

A person's identity is not something fixed, stable and unitary that they acquire early in life and possess forever afterwards. Rather identity is shifting and multiple, something people are continually constructing and reconstructing in their encounters with each other in the world.

(Cameron, 2001: 170)

Identity is therefore an ongoing venture, responsive to social stimuli, and created through interaction, a view I will develop in this section.

Identity as a social construct

Social constructionism is perhaps the best-known view of identity as something created between people (e.g. Berger and Luckman, 1967; Burr, 1995). Shotter (1993), for example, talks of 'joint action' to emphasise that identity is constructed in tandem with others rather than somehow emanating from internal psychic structures. Constructing an identity as a competent academic writer, for example, involves an often protracted dialogic process of socialisation into the expectations of a new community. Something of this can be seen in the responses language teachers make on undergraduate students' essays, as this example from a recorded protocol suggests (Hyland and Hyland, 2001) (*italics* = student's text; **bold** = teacher's written comment; other = teacher's self-talk):

(2)

In a free market economy there are more productive efficiency than in a planned economy and consumers are happier for they can choose and get the goods they want and are willing to buy most by themselves. Ha ha she clearly knows which one she wants, but a very sudden end – OK – **the conclusion is a bit abrupt – you need to re-state some of the main points – the essay is rather** – it's way too much – **middle heavy. The conclusion is the place in an academic essay where you reinforce your main point and bring the reader round to your ideas.**

Here the teacher is responding to a student writer rather than to a student text, engaging with her as a novice writer in a dialogic process of instruction. Behind the feedback comments is an assumption that the student is learning to identify with the community and that this is aided through interactions of this kind with experienced members.

Social constructionism's view of identity as a form of social action rather than a psychological construct is not really new. Its seeds are evident in the symbolic interactionism of Mead (1934) and Cooley (1964) who saw identity as produced through socialisation, and then made and remade in people's dealings with others throughout their lives. We form our individual identities by seeing ourselves as other people see us, the image we get of ourselves that is reflected back from other members of our communities. Seen from this perspective, the self is thoroughly a social product, an emergent ongoing creation that we construct over time in our attempt to form a consistent orientation to the world.

In this Symbolic Interactionist work, there is therefore a close link between self and society, but the link seems altogether too smooth and unproblematic, as if the self is simply the product of others' approval. The use of language allows individuals to become self-conscious agents acting in their communities by taking on its values, roles and norms, but there is no space here for other elements of experience. Not only does this view neglect individual desires and aspirations, but it conflates the personal and social to a degree where social control seems to actually constitute identity. In other words, it is difficult to see how conflicts might arise between the self and one's community and how individuals might cope with exclusion.

Managing an impression

Erving Goffman's (1971 and 1981) well-known work on 'impression management' follows Mead (1934) in seeing the self as situated in everyday life but represents this as an altogether more strategic enterprise. Goffman argued that the self consists of the individual's awareness of the many different roles that are performed in different contexts. These roles involve individuals in continually monitoring the impressions they make on others from behind a public mask, consciously stage-managing how they engage with them in order to achieve particular goals. People move relatively effortlessly, for example, between contexts which demand either highlighting or downplaying occupational, family, gender, class and ethnic roles, and perform these seriously, playfully, self-consciously or ironically at different times. Identity in this view is the outcome of collaborative interactions in particular situations where performances are treated as if they represent the real person.

At the centre of Goffman's detailed analysis of process and meaning in interaction is the relationship between performance and front stage. An actor performs in a setting which is constructed of a stage and a backstage, using

parts of the physical context as props (such as a wall of books in an office) and watched by an audience at the same time as the actor is an audience for the plays of that audience. The actor's main goal is to maintain the coherence of a performance and to adjust to different settings. The process of establishing social identity is therefore closely linked to the concept of 'front', or 'that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance' (Goffman, 1971: 22). The front acts as a vehicle of standardisation, allowing others to understand the individual on the basis of projected traits.

A clear example of this is the conference presentation, where the speaker seeks to achieve rapport through informality and an explicitly interactive stance while meeting expectations of competence associated with an academic presentation. In this (slightly edited) extract, we see a speaker seeking to diffuse potential criticism of her research by establishing an identity as a junior academic (up to the third round of audience laughter), then presenting the purpose and method of her research in a way which meets the audience members' definition of what they expect to find in this genre:

(3)

Speaker: hi. uh good morning. uh it's a great pleasure to be here to give a talk uh, in front of all these people, um. I, uh have to acknowledge the great work of John Swales um, he used to I think he is the first scholar to introduce, uh citation analysis into applied linguistics. his paper appeared in applied linguistics in 1984 I think. and, uh, I didn't read it when it was published, but I later I read it.

Audience: 'laugh'

Speaker: it was very useful I it was a huge sort of field. my appeal to me to get into this citation analysis but to me it was very useful for my dissertation so I very briefly touched on citation analysis then later I was very, interested to do more then I applied for this Morley scholar and then they kindly gave me but unfortunately when I came in 2001 um, I was really overwhelmed by the amount of data so I did just photocopying all the time

Audience: 'laugh'

Speaker: and I felt a bit guilty of giving a kind of short um showed uh, I'm going to say, I didn't give him a well I didn't do things which I was supposed to do so now I'm trying to pay the debt in instalments

Audience: 'laugh'

Speaker: okay. I'm going to start. so citation analysis is a very useful view and I was very interested in the difference between English speakers' writing and Jap- because I'm Japanese um I thought there might be some well lots of difficulties

for Japanese. so I was comparing the differences between Japanese writing and, um English speakers' writing. and because I did my dissertation in the UK I interviewed the British academics and of course no Japanese and I compared. Then now, when citation analysis came in, I thought oh maybe I can compare sort of papers highly cited sort of very well known written by very well known established scholars, possibly. so I created three categories one um highly cited papers and another one papers written by English speakers, and the other one is papers written by uh Japanese. and then I tried to see some differences ...

(JSCC06)

To present a compelling front, to effectively engage in 'impression management', the actor needs to both fill the expectations of the social role and consistently communicate the characteristics of the role to others. In addition to content selection, the use of 'contextualisation cues' (Gumperz, 1982) such as changes in voice quality, intonation, gesture and so on can signal in-group bonding and engagement with an audience, thereby indicating particular identity positions (Archakis and Papazachariou, 2008). The audience, in turn, verifies the honesty of the performance through monitoring these unconscious non-verbal signals which are inadvertently 'given off' rather than given. Although we cannot know with certainty how our signals will be interpreted, we attempt to present an 'idealised' version of the front consistent with the norms of the group.

Roles and performances

Impression management therefore draws attention to the *performative* aspects of identity and to the fact that individuals consciously pursue personal goals in attempting to be seen as a certain kind of person. It would be wrong to take the dramaturgical image too far as this is not a pre-learned and delivered 'script'. Rather, individuals are socialised through habitual experience to 'fill in' and manage the positions they adopt so that actions derive from 'a command of an idiom' which they enact from one moment to the next and become more comfortable with over time. In other words, we consciously *improvise* performances to assume identities as good students, hard-working lab technicians, Nobel scientists, contentious researchers or whatever. We need to enact and re-enact our selves again and again:

A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished and well articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good

faith, it is none the less something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized.

(Goffman, 1971: 75)

The question obviously arises about where this leaves our sense of a single coherent self. Is there a 'real me' hidden on the inside which views these performances with a coherent and unifying eye? Goffman (1975) flatly denies the existence of a character behind the performer and sees the self as 'a stance taking entity' of shifting alignments, strategically adjusting to different communicative events. So by focusing on the analysis of interaction, Goffman avoids the trap of seeing roles as normatively determined behaviour patterns where individuals automatically become the role they play. Roles can be played with more, or less, attachment or antipathy, and actors can conform to or resist the roles that are situationally available to them. Many students, for example, resist taking on the kind of objective, author-evacuated stance their academic writing asks of them. In other words, self-conscious decision-making allows actors to distance themselves from expected conventions so that they can 'play at' rather than 'play' a role or bring other aspects of their experience to style the role in their own way.

Goffman (1981) coins the term *footing* to describe the different ways people can take up recognised identities. The choice of footing depends on the combination of three speaking roles available at any moment in talk: the *animator* is the one who speaks or writes the words, the *author* is the one who originates them and the *principal* is the one who believes them. Usually, there is congruence between the three roles, but speakers can make delicate shifts in epistemic or affective stance, changing their commitments and articulating different identities or positions. Such changes capture something of the sparkly qualities of interaction and suggest how actors can inhabit roles in individual ways to perform distinct identities so that in a lecture, for example, a speaker may reframe a serious utterance as irony or move from a formal delivery to a personal aside by a change in footing.

One option speakers have is to manipulate the tenor, or interpersonal attitude, they take to their audience. In this extract from a MICASE undergraduate presentation, for example, the speaker seeks to display knowledge and a presentational competence to the tutor for a class grade and also to speak directly to a group of classmates who may be critical of the academic literacy conventions the genre requires. He does this in a way which avoids the ideologically inscribed identity the discourse makes available by

separating the *animator* from the *principal*, the presenter from the believer, by mixing the authorised discourse with a more conversational style of delivery:

(4)

Okay we just went through that. Alright so basically how is this all found out? They um, did a lot of work on mice and rats obviously and they're they have O-B O-B mice which um are lacking the O-B gene and these mi- so these mice they don't produce um, a lot of leptin and they were found to be obese as um, was hypothesized by the researchers. So then they went and they took out the gene that makes neuropeptide Y as well as the gene that makes leptin. And these mice so they thought okay since we're taking out both these genes there's not gonna be any leptin, but there's not gonna be any neuropeptide Y to stimulate feeding. So they thought that these mice um, should show decreased um decreased weight like, lower than normal or like about normal. But what actually ended up happening was these mice were, heavier than the normal mice, but they were, lighter than the mice that were lacked in leptin altogether.

(MICASE: STP175SU141)

While footing is often communicated prosodically, we can see that the speaker's alignment, or projected self, is at issue here as he is animating a message while keeping some distance from it. Although he takes responsibility for selecting the words and ideas as an author, he frames information about the methodology of obesity experiments as a narrative. By foregrounding the actions of scientists rather than the wider concerns which drive the work, and by adopting conversational features of anecdote, hesitations, repetitions, fillers, projected quotes and vagueness, he separates himself as a *speaker* from the *institution* whose position is represented.

The idea that identity is generated in concrete and specific interactional occasions has been picked up by those who emphasise its *performative* nature. Thus Judith Butler (1990) famously theorises gender identity as endlessly played out in discourse, while Brubaker (2004) shows how an apparently stable identity category such as ethnicity is a product of identification, rather than something people can be said to have. Both reject essentialist models of identity so that Butler, for example, asserts that there is no gender identity behind its expression in actual performances. For post-modern theorists such as Laclau (1990), this transient view of identity suggests that individuals have multiple or hybrid identities and that they can switch between them at will. I would want to argue, along with Butler, however, that identities are not limitless but are constrained by the authority of historical repetition. The ways

that we perform our particular identities involve a considerable accumulation of unconscious practices which allow for new elements in each new iteration, but which also structure how we project ourselves in interaction.

1.3 Identity and community

The accumulation of these practices is continually co-constructed and re-constructed in interactions with others in social communities. The idea of *community*, and of some collective identification with a community, is vital to understanding both disciplines and identities. This adds the dimension of routine engagement to identity construction, as it is through relationships with significant others that we identify similarity and difference and so generate both group and individual identities. Behind every individual's engagement in a professional existence lies an institutional identity constructed through countless interactions. Community, in fact, helps us not only to better understand language use but also to appreciate the ways it works in the construction of identity.

The individual and the group

Some theorists believe that group membership is central to identity because it offers a basis for marking out differences and similarities with others through social comparisons. The social psychological perspective of Social Identity Theory or SIT (Giles and Coupland, 1991; Tajfel, 1982), for example, distinguishes between personal identity and social identity and sees both as constructed through processes of categorisation. *Personal identity* refers to the unique personal attributes which differentiate us from others and which are generally based on a sense of self-continuity and uniqueness. *Social identity*, on the other hand, is an individual's perception of himself or herself as a member of a group, particularly in terms of value and emotional attachment. Social identities imply that we invest in the identity positions which our groups make available and build a self based on a dichotomy between *us* and *them*, creating in-group identification and out-group discrimination (e.g. Tajfel, 1982).

SIT therefore suggests that group membership provides actors with ways of categorising both others and themselves so that they can perform a recognisable identity, but it also sets up a tension between personal and social identities. This is because awareness of a personal identity inhibits the perception of in-group similarities, while a social identity limits the perception

of individual differences among group members. We need to be cautious in creating an arbitrary division between personal and social identity, but this is nevertheless a potentially useful distinction. Both similarity to and difference from others, or assimilation to the group and differentiation from it, are central to identity, but they need to be seen *together* to understand how identities are shaped in interaction. An overemphasis on individuality can easily underestimate the reality and significance of our communities to us, and so how we relate meaningfully and consistently to other members, while too great a focus on similarity can encourage a slide into conformism.

The fact that we generally experience a continuity and coherence in our sense of self makes it important to account for the dual presence of personal and social identities and avoid privileging one over the other (Alvesson et al., 2008). Goffman, Mead and the Symbolic Interactionists attempted to resolve this duality by exploring the relational aspects of identity and foregrounding the ways we adopt consistent alignments to others. It is, for example, difficult to experience oneself as an inspiring supervisor or teacher without a group of devoted students. However, SIT's neglect of interaction in favour of experimentation leads to a narrow concentration on the individual who seeks to construct an identity outside of community pressures and isolated from the repeated influences of others. It is therefore unable to show how identification emerges through participation in community discourses.

Cohen's (1985) notion of community as a 'symbolic construct' is perhaps a more helpful account of how individuals create a sense of themselves as belonging in a particular setting of relationships and interactions. For him, notions of similarity and difference are at the heart of people's awareness of their culture, so community is a potent symbolic presence in our lives, allowing us to see that others do things differently. This view stresses the cognitive rather than the structural importance of communities and emphasises the role of a group culture as experienced by its members. Communities are therefore extremely powerful imaginings upon which individuals draw rhetorically and strategically, encompassing notions of inclusion and exclusion and carrying a normative dimension of 'how things should be'. As Jenkins (2008: 23) observes: 'Solidarity, once it is conjured up, is a powerful force.'

Community and discourse

The idea of community draws attention to the idea that we do not use language to communicate with the world at large, but with other members of our social

groups, each with its own beliefs, categorisations, sets of conventions and ways of doing things. It therefore unites aspects of context that are crucial to the production and interpretation of spoken and written discourse and therefore to language choice and identity. These aspects include knowledge of a cultural and interpersonal situation, knowledge of interlocutors, knowledge of the world and knowledge of texts and conventions for saying things. In particular it follows Faigley's (1986: 535) claim that writing 'can be understood only from the perspective of a society rather than a single individual' and Geertz's (1973) view that knowledge, talk and writing depend on the actions of members of local communities. 'Community' therefore offers a way of bringing interactants and texts together into a common rhetorical space, foregrounding the conceptual frames that individuals use to organise their experience and get things done using language. It provides a schema which allows individuals to process and evaluate each others' social performances effectively.

Engaging in a community's discourses thus provides security for individuals by making the world meaningful and populated by others who have similar understandings and ways of sharing ideas. This is not something achieved overnight or picked up easily, but something that is learnt both formally and informally through engagement. Conventional modes of expression help reinforce a sense of self by eliminating ambiguity and promoting similarity. Vološinov (1973: 87) put this well:

Each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other'. I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown down between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me then the other depends on my addressee. A word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee.

Community is therefore a potent notion for mobilising values and images for members, although these might be different for different people, particularly as symbols are abstract and often vague and imprecise. So while members may *aggregate* around certain practices and ways of thinking, they do not necessarily *integrate* (Cohen, 1985: 20). Differences of opinion are normal and natural, but often hidden by a veneer of agreement and a common symbolic discourse which constructs a boundary to outsiders. Although Cohen overemphasises the importance of thinking over doing, it is clear that it is through the *products* of thinking that individuals produce and reproduce

communities. Thinking and actions are accomplished through talk and working together in common pursuits, and the patterns of this talk, developed through countless encounters in corridors, conference halls, seminar rooms and research papers, both formal and informal, planned and ad hoc, contribute to the community's distinct interactional identity. It is not only a shared belief but also the sense of organising their lives with reference to it that make communities real for individuals.

Reflection and dialogue

Community participation therefore involves at least some command of relevant cultural and social practices. If identity is *performed*, then actors need to have some understanding of the events in which they perform and what *counts* as performing a competent identity in those events. Both Goffman (1971) and Giddens (1991), for instance, argue that reflexivity, as a sense-making facility, allows us to read and monitor social contexts, actions and wider cultural signs and to change our behaviour in response to these readings, so changing the events themselves. But while knowledge of the practices of our communities is important, it is not decisive. Of course the ways we engage with others say something about who we are, or how we would like to be seen, but identities are more than mere performance. They need to be ratified in the identifications of others and this, in turn, has consequences for how we see ourselves. In other words, we are not simply whoever we want to be, but continually develop and contest others' identifications of us within our social groups.

Views of the self such as that proposed by Goffman suggest a view of the individual freely exercising rational choice in pursuit of self-interested goals, but this seriously underestimates the exercise of power in social relationships. In fact, we have to see individual identities as emerging from the synthesis of internal self-definition and the external definitions of oneself by others, particularly powerful others. As I have been arguing, this is an interactive process and the connection between them is recoverable through analysis of the ways individuals engage in community discourses.

To adequately theorise social identity, then, we need to acknowledge the dialectic between how we see ourselves and how others see us. The self is dialogic – a relation – as we take an active and responsive role to language, we get our sense of self from others (Bakhtin, 1981). For Bakhtin, all text is produced in relation to previous texts and, as writers appropriate and transform them, they textually construct social identities in the sense of

representing themselves in alignment, or dissonance, with those discourses. Lemke (1995: 24) observes that

we speak with the voices of our communities, and to the extent that we have individual voices, we fashion these out of the social voices already available to us, appropriating the words of others to speak a word of our own.

In any context, however, one discourse is likely to be dominant and hence more visible so that individuals, consciously or unconsciously, tend to take up the identity options this privileged discourse makes available (Wertsch, 1991).

Power and identity inscription

Powerful discourses, such as those authorised by academic disciplines, certainly help define any situation and act to restrict what identities can be performed. Some theorists go even further and argue that our identities are not co-constructed by the processes of identification, but actually inscribed in the discourses which are available in a context. Foucault (1972), for example, sees identities as the product of the dominant discourses which are tied to institutional practices. The subject, in fact, is brought into being through language: identity here is merely the effect of discourse (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

This is, however, something of a one-sided and deterministic model of identity which downplays the creativity of human action and ignores the impact of emotions on behaviour. As Elliott (2007) points out, it is discourse that produces human experiences for Foucault rather than experiences producing discourse: the individual is therefore merely an artefact of discourse and not an initiator of action. Clearly, however, some kind of reflexive choice making is important to human behaviour so people can resist, negotiate or refuse the restrictive subject positions which are available (e.g. Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema, 2008).

While authoritative discourses limit the identities we can adopt, they do not exclude the possibility of agency. Bakhtin (1986), for example, talks of a process of 'becoming' as we develop an awareness of our tacit choices and habits of meaning-making to gain control over our projections of self in speaking and writing. We draw on a repertoire of voices as we communicate, bringing to the task our own experiences, purposes and conceptions of self to recombine the options offered by the genre to perform a community identity. Our diverse experiences and memberships of overlapping communities,

including those of class, ethnicity and gender, influence how we understand our disciplinary participation and how we interact with our colleagues in the performance of this academic identity. All these present us with discursive alternatives, or what Ivanič (1998), borrowing from Foucault, calls ‘available subject positions’, which allow us, potentially, to represent ourselves in different ways.

Continuity and integration

To sum this up, while identity may be personal and unique, it is constructed through socialisation into communities so that internal self-definition and external definitions by others eventually form a synthesis which is the self (Jenkins, 2008). This emphasis on the surface malleability of identity, however, leaves open the question of what lurks beneath as a foundation for human activity and ignores some important ontological issues (Bendle, 2002: 8). Consistency is a concerted accomplishment of social actors and a key element to how we understand and conduct ourselves, creating a self ‘as a sensible, accountable, rational, reliable, human being’ (Edwards and Stokoe, 2004: 501). It is the recurrence of the opportunities to enact identities, the access we have to particular situations, genres, material resources and rhetorical affordances, which links the long- and short-term performance of our identities and shapes our sense of self. A sense of identification with others in a community therefore ‘often comes to feel enduring, even though it is a process never completed – always “in process”’ (Hall, 1996: 2).

The longer-term aspects of our identity are therefore not created in a single performance but are crafted and managed across time and across situations. We experience a certain continuity in who we believe we are, a coherence from one day to the next, and we call this capacity to integrate and hold our varying experiences together our *identity*. We can therefore see the self at the centre of a Venn diagram of overlapping experiences in various domains – at the heart of negotiated intersections with other simultaneously held ‘identities’. In other words, our identities are the product of our lives in different communities, and we learn to interact with different kinds of people in those communities, building both a cumulative repertoire of roles we can play along with an attitude to those roles and how we want to play them. Our identities are built through discourse and linked to situations, to relationships, and to the positions we adopt in engaging with others on a routine basis.

1.4 Identity and academic discourses

This idea that identity is constructed by negotiating performances in engagement with others over time suggests that identity is not just about being male, Chinese, a parent or whatever, but importantly for many people, also about being a classicist or physicist, an engineer or an archaeologist. Discourse is central here because taking on a voice associated with a particular field of study involves aligning oneself with its knowledge-making practices: the topics it believes are worth talking about and how it talks about them. Acting as academics, individuals attempt to embed their talk in a particular social world which they reflect and conjure up through the discourses which others anticipate and understand. Discovering how individuals perform academic identities therefore involves the study of disciplinary discourses.

Disciplinary discourses and identity

To project an identity as an academic means buying into the practices of a discipline and handling its discourses with sufficient competence to participate as a group member. How individuals exchange information, build alliances, dispute ideas and work together varies according to the group they belong to, so each discipline might be seen as a distinct academic *culture* (Hyland, 2004a) or *tribe* (Becher and Trowler, 2001), each with its particular norms and practices. As Wells (1992: 290) observes:

Each subject discipline constitutes a way of making sense of human experience that has evolved over generations and each is dependent on its own particular practices: its instrumental procedures, its criteria for judging relevance and validity, and its conventions of acceptable forms of argument. In a word each has developed its own modes of discourse.

Disciplinary discourses thus allow us to communicate in ways that others can see as ‘doing biology’ or ‘doing sociology’ or, more importantly, as ‘being biologists’ or ‘sociologists’. Their conventions both restrict how something can be said and authorise the writer as someone competent to say it. They comprise what Gee (2004) calls the ‘affinity spaces’ where people interact through shared practices in a common endeavour.

Choices in language affect not only the ideational meaning of the text, or what is being talked *about*, but also the impression of the writer which is conveyed. To be a scientist, for example, involves reworking experience through a range of technical terms which are ordered to explain how things happen or

exist. Example (5) is typical, where the writer replaces common-sense ways of seeing the world with specialised concepts and complex noun phrases to describe the results of a process:

(5)

Cavity nucleation occurs as a consequence of stress concentrations developed at, for example, GB carbide particles, where GBS is inhibited by these particles so that the rate of sliding depends on the rate at which diffusion or plastic strain accommodation can occur through or around particles. This inhibition of sliding leads to local stress concentrations, which are dependent on the spacing, and the size, of the GB carbide particles (i.e. the reciprocal of Equation 7).

To be a philosopher, on the other hand, an individual must use abstraction rather than technicality, moving from instances to generalisations by gradually shifting away from particular contexts. In example (6) the writer begins with a narrative, rather than the scientist's exposition, to provide a fictional scenario that leads logically to a question that he himself has posed, introducing the abstract from the concrete:

(6)

Doris has just driven her car into a tree. She's unconscious, slumped over the steering wheel. Perry comes upon the scene. He looks around to see if anyone can help, but there's no one else there. Visions of wrecked cars catching fire and exploding into boiling balls of flame fill his mind, and he feels that he must rescue the driver now or else she'll surely die. So, with considerable trepidation, Perry rushes in and quickly drags Doris free from the wreck, thinking that at any moment both he and she might get caught in the explosion. As it happens, the car does not explode. Soon after, some emergency vehicles screech to a halt. Paramedics jump out. The paramedics take a look at Doris, and they arrive at a chilling conclusion: Perry has paralysed Doris. Is Perry morally responsible for what he has done? That depends. One thing it depends on is whether Perry acted freely in paralysing Doris.

Because identities are only successful to the extent that they are recognised by other people, these ways of using language tend to encourage the performance of certain identities and to exclude others, limiting what a person can bring from their past experience and constraining what they might take from the current situation. How we chose to express ourselves must resonate with colleagues, examiners or teachers, and this means finding a balance between accommodating ourselves to, and appropriating the language of, our disciplines (Bakhtin, 1986). The study of disciplinary discourses

therefore informs the study of identity: it reveals how actors understand what it means to be a philosopher or physicist, how far particular individuals decide to take on these identities and how they perform them. For some, this will not form a central part of who they see themselves to be, while for others it will be a core part of their self-representation.

Academic writing, and speaking, is thus an act of identity. The two are linked because writing is not just about conveying ‘content’ but about the representation of ‘self’: how we portray ourselves to others in our disciplines. As the examples above suggest, writing inscribes particular versions of ourselves at the same time as we present our versions of reality, using available discourses to both position ourselves to others and talk about the world.

Negotiating self-representation: The case of self-mention

One example of how academics and students use the resources of their disciplines to negotiate a self-representation is the preference for the use or avoidance of self-mention. Examples like these, from applied linguistics and electrical engineering articles, are commonplace and reflect the fact that explicit reference to the author is over four times more common in humanities and social science articles than those in the hard sciences (Hyland, 2001b):

(7)

I bring to bear on the problem **my own** experience. This experience contains ideas derived from reading **I have done** which might be relevant to **my puzzlement** as well as **my personal contacts** with teaching contexts.

(AL article)

This paper presents results of work performed to investigate the effects of area reduction, friction and material hardening models on the deformation behaviour in the extrusion of an aluminium alloy. **In the paper**, the effects of the extrusion process parameter on defect formation during extrusion **is investigated** and the effects of friction in extrusion processes on defect formation **are considered**. The influence of friction on defect formation during extrusion processes **is established**.

(EE article)

Such differences not only suggest how writers seek to portray themselves and their work to readers in different domains, but how they construct legitimate and recognisable identities as applied linguists and engineers. The use of an impersonal scientific discourse, for instance, implies that the writer has a commitment to universalistic knowledge motivated by

conceptual issues. It helps construct an identity as someone who sees truth as originating in direct access to phenomena in the external world and who believes this truth is recoverable through controlled experiments (e.g. Whitley, 1984). We recognise here an individual who has confidence in methods of explaining the world through familiar procedures and relatively clear criteria of acceptability. By downplaying his or her personal role in the research, then, he or she not only highlights the phenomena under study and the generality of the findings, but his or her credibility as a scientist. The avoidance of first person strengthens the objectivity of interpretations by suggesting that research outcomes would be the same irrespective of the individual conducting it. One of my respondents expressed this view clearly:

(8)

I feel a paper is stronger if we are allowed to see what was done without ‘we did this’ and ‘we think that’. Of course we know there are researchers there, making interpretations and so on, but this is just assumed. It’s part of the background. I’m looking for something interesting in the study and it shouldn’t really matter who did what in any case.

(Bio interview)

In contrast, academics who work in the soft fields see knowledge as altogether more socially contingent and employ a discourse which projects a very different identity. Their language choices recognise that variables are generally less precisely measurable and less clear-cut than in the hard sciences, and so they need to adopt a form of argument that puts a real writer in the text. Here then, self-mention can help construct an identity as an intelligent, credible and engaging colleague with the desire both to strongly identify himself or herself with a particular argument and to gain credit for an individual perspective:

(9)

The personal pronoun ‘I’ is very important in philosophy. It not only tells people that it is your own unique point of view, but that you believe what you are saying. It shows your colleagues where you stand in relation to the issues and in relation to where they stand on them. It marks out the differences.

(Phil interview)

The first person therefore assists authors to make a personal standing in their texts and to demarcate their own work from others. It helps them distinguish

who they are and what they have to say. Focusing on interpersonal features of language such as this has been particularly productive for analysts elaborating how writers position themselves in relation to their work and their readers. I will take up the issue of first person in identity construction again in Chapter 8.

Appropriation and alienation

When academics or students sit down to write an essay or research paper, they take on the words and roles that the discipline makes available and so lose something of their ‘individuality’; trading isolation for involvement and separateness for membership. As I have mentioned, these discourses influence individuals by restricting the available subject positions they can occupy and encouraging identities based on an autonomous and impersonal observer (e.g. Ivanič and Simpson, 1992). This is not to say that the conventions are fixed and monolithic – they change over time in response to changing circumstances – but individual discursive innovations are unlikely to be readily accepted.

Some theorists stress that these discourses make it possible to reconfigure our experiences and to discuss complex issues with precision and subtlety (Halliday, 1998). They are resources that can be used to categorise, quantify and evaluate according to the perspectives of a discipline. It is a discourse which carries authority and commands esteem, allowing individuals to engage with others in ways they find convincing and persuasive. Other theorists, however, see these literacy demands as alienating and restricting, forcing users to portray themselves as something they think they are not by adopting a rational, anonymous persona which can seem pretentious and false. Students, in particular, often feel manipulated by the impersonality and abstractness of academic discourses into presenting themselves in ways which they don’t recognise and which perhaps they don’t much like.

Novice researchers and students from non-mainstream social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, in particular, often find their familiar ways of making meaning marginalised and dimensions of their personal knowledge denied. As one of Ivanič’s subjects noted:

The thing about me is I cannot just write as an ordinary person, I have to have ... to say, look this person when you read it you’ve got to know that I’m a black woman.

(Ivanič, 1998: 314)

The fact that specific forms and wordings are marked as more, or less, institutionally appropriate means that writing is a complex negotiation of

a sense of identity and the institutional regulation of meaning-making, and students are not always willing to drop their everyday lives to take up this new, institutional identity.

This means that negotiating a representation of self from the standardising conventions of disciplinary discourses is often, perhaps always, going to be rather fraught as actors manage the tension between shared norms and individual traits. This is interesting simply as a skilled accomplishment, but more generally it is worth studying for what it can reveal about the ways individuals carve an independent self from personal experiences created around shared practices.

1.5 Conclusions

Identity amounts to a subjective achievement to sustain a coherent self alongside cultural messages and discursive practices which our communities offer us. While it may be a 'performance', and so subject to change and reinterpretation, identity is a performance which is informed and reinscribed in us over time, constituting dispositions to behave in certain ways and make particular discourse choices in routine situations. Mediating between enduring social structures and the routines of our everyday interactional experiences, identity helps characterise both what makes us similar to and different from each other. For academics, it is how they simultaneously achieve credibility as insiders and reputations as individuals.

However, while academic discourses seek to limit the ways we enact our membership through rhetorical positioning and by constant monitoring and evaluation of our performances, we are not merely the product of these available stereotypes. As Richards (2006: 5) notes:

Those involved in the talk are not actors on a stage whose every word is predetermined. Responsibility for the dialogue that eventually emerges falls to them, and although the process of construction must be based on a shared understanding of the interactional business in hand, (the conventional features) are not determinants of the talk so much as resources on which the interactants can draw.

The unique amalgam of experiences that we bring from participation in other communities sets us apart from any one of them and allows us greater space to pursue our own agendas and, within limits, to craft a distinctive way of occupying any role.

So while the gaze of others places limits on how far individuals can

opt in or out of prefigured roles or subject positions, they are by no means simply the products of disciplinary discourses. They learn to be the people they are through the meanings they give to their interactions. They gradually understand community expectations through the ways others respond to their discourse and behaviours. At the same time, however, they chart a course between their unique feelings and dispositions and the off-the-peg identities provided by a discipline, finding a voice that makes use of local conventions but which says something about who they believe they are. These, then, are the themes of this book: how our language choices position us and others; how individual agency and community expectations interact in discourse; and how our engagement with others contributes to our sense of self. In the next chapter I look more closely at these issues by focusing on disciplines more directly and the ways identity is rhetorically constructed through proximity and positioning.