

***Constructing Identities at Work*, Jo Angouri and Meredith Mara (eds.). 2011.**

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Reviewed by Monica ARDELEANU (GOMOESCU)<sup>1</sup>

In seeking to define identity, people attempt to assert their individuality, but also to join others, and in doing so, they work to maintain their sense of status or self-esteem. The individual, however, does not just live in a large amorphous society; he is a member of various groups – religious, ethnic, work-related – by choice, by birth or by imposition (Buckingham 2008).

Through continuous interaction with others, individuals construct personal and group identities. In the workplace context this includes the way individuals construct themselves as the manager, team leader, meeting chair, a good colleague, the judge, a teacher or researcher. We can also grasp on how different forms of positive work-related identity construction can strengthen employees through building social resources (Dutton, Roberts & Bednar 2010).

*Constructing Identities at Work* introduces forefront research on the process of identity construction in professional contexts, varying from corporate offices, to courtrooms, classrooms, and academia. The authors illustrate the diversity of methodologies and approaches common in the recently emerging field of workplace discourse, demonstrating how individuals do identity work and how identity is indexed in workplace discourse. Moving beyond static universalities, each of the authors underline the contextualized essence of our everyday lives and the ways in which individuals negotiate and renegotiate their developing identities with others. Among the three parts of the book there are examples of different theoretical approaches to identity, reaching from the social constructionist perspective to the close-up view accessible through conversation analysis, and the quantitative analysis proposed by corpus linguistics.

The introduction creates a framework on the identity negotiation process, covering and clarifying several areas, such as: identity across the social sciences, the sub-field of workplace discourse, constructing identity at work, underlining that workplace discourse has established a solid position within discourse analytic approaches.

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<sup>1</sup> *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

The eleven contributions are grouped together into three different parts, starting with the identity construction in business context (Part 1), continuing with the implications of rhetoric and ideology in identity construction (Part 2), and finally to the way in which professional identities emerge in institutional contexts (Part III).

Part 1 (“Leadership Identity in Business Contexts”) comprises four contributions on leadership style, humour at work, and the co-construction of professional identities. In his study “Leadership Style in Manager’s Feedback in Meetings”, focusing on how identity is constructed in management meeting, Jan Svennevig undertakes a dual aim, firstly to investigate the sequence of the responses in order to depict the structuring actions and phrases and, secondly, to elaborate on how the different conceptualizations of the roles and identities of the senior managers arise. The methodological frame for his research relies on Conversational Analyses, embracing the relational and procedural concept of identity proposed by Goffman (1959) and the professional identity (Richards 2006) and leadership (Ford 2008, Pomerantz and Denvir 2007) concepts previously defined in the literature. In his study, Svennevig analyses professional identity in connection to the social relations established among the participants in the meetings, moreover describing the various ways “managers contribute to such relations in terms of leadership style” (Svennevig 2011: 19).

The second paper “Be(com)ing a Leader: A case Study of Co-Constructing Professional Identities at Work” (Stephanie Schnurr and Olga Zayts) examines the way in which leader identities are discursively co-constructed and negotiated from a social constructionist perspective, concentrating on the means by which leader identity is accomplished through interaction. The research builds on a conceptual frame based on which identities are dynamically negotiated in interaction through complementary relations (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, De Fina 2010, Sarangi 2010, Hall 2000), and relies on the social constructionist framework that treats identity as a constantly shaping and developing process as defined by Holmes (2000). The authors aim at identifying and describing the processes relating to the co-construction of professional identities, based on a corpus extracted from video-recordings, interviews and participant observations. The relationality, indexicality and intersubjectivity principles, as defined by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), represent the conceptual stage useful in describing the processes part of the leader identity (co-)construction. The analysis demonstrates that the structuring of leader identity may involve antagonistic and challenging discourses that actually offer the ground for creating interactional identities.

In the next article “Chairing International Business Meetings: Investigating Humour and Leadership Style in the Workplace”, the author (Pamela Rogerson-Revell) builds her analyses on interaction-based research into leadership in workplace settings, with a focus on humour and on how meeting chairs use it as one of the several discursive strategies for their leadership identity construction. The analytical framework of this study relies on interactional sociolinguistics,

concentrating on detailed linguistic analysis of verbal interactions, under the direct influence of Gumperz (1982) and Coupland (2007) and the concept of *communicative style* resulting from the use of discursive strategies. Building her analyses on a corpus of meetings data collected from two international organizations, the author comes to the conclusion that all chairs make use of humour both relationally and transactionally: to establish solidarity and to “do power”, pointing out that there is limited evidence of humour used just to generate new ideas and solve problems.

The last article of this series “‘OK one last thing for today then’: Constructing Identities in Corporate Meeting Talk” (Jo Angouri and Meredith Mara) explores the way in which the meeting chair discursively builds and negotiates his identity in the advantaged role of meeting controller. The theoretical frame of this research is built on the concept of Communities of Practice developed by Lave and Wenger (1998), mainly on the *shared repertoire* dimension (the specific discourse repertoire distinguishing one community from the other). The corpus selected for the present study includes both formal and informal meetings’ data in order to depict possible differences in the way of building the discourse. The results show that chairs enact in different ways depending on the local context, floor management is clearly different in formal and informal meetings and the chair performs significant discourse moves in order to construct identity in both types of meetings.

Part 2 (“Rhetoric, Expertise and Ideology in Identity Construction”) is a collection of two contributions focusing mainly on the construction of professional identities in corporate mission statements and in situations when there is not yet a profession. The first article of this series “‘Hard-working, team oriented individuals’: Constructing Professional Identities in Corporate Mission Statements (Veronika Koller) proposes an analysis of the way language and rhetoric of mission statements help in the construction of particular professional identities for employees and situate them in relation to the company and other parties involved. Thus, the author builds her analysis of the corpus (30,000 words of relevant texts from 50 companies) on previous research on mission statements (Bartkus and Glassman 2008; Klemm et al. 1991), while combining systemic-functional grammar with classical Western rhetoric as two analytical frameworks. The comparative analysis of the mission statements shows how different social and historical contexts lead to different linguistic and rhetorical emphases and strategies, thus impacting on what professional identities are constructed for employees. As a conclusion, the author points out that even if there is a limited reception of mission statements within organizations, employees as readers may show resistance, ranging from alternative to oppositional identities to general cynicism regarding mission statements.

Eva-Maria Graf’s contribution to this section (“‘Yes then I will tell you maybe a little bit about the procedure” – Constructing Professional Identity where there is not yet a Profession: The Case of Executive Coaching”) proposes a new and

challenging field of analyses, represented by executive coaching - that is not yet a profession, with no clear-cut standards and requirements. The author aims at answering the question of how do coaches and clients deal with the uncertainties that surround institutional routines when performing and co-constructing their identities as professional coaches. In order to answer this question, the author undergoes corpus (recordings of nine coaching processes) analysis employing Conversation Analysis (De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006) and Critical Discourse Analysis together with other methods from the larger field of pragmatics and interactional sociolinguistics. Building on the two concepts proposed by Goffman (1959) and Sarangi and Roberts (1999) – *frontstage* and *backstage* – the author concludes that coaching interaction moves frontstage, deviating from the established professional practices where such interactions take place backstage.

The third part of the book (“Professional Identities in Institutional Contexts”) comprises four articles concentrating on the construction of out-of-(work) place identity, ideological and researcher identities, and ending with a view on personal disclosure and professional responsibility.

The first contribution to this section (“Teachers, Students and Ways of Telling in Classroom Sites: A Case of Out-of-(Work) Place Identities”), written by Alexandra Georgakopoulou, moves the attention from corporate to academic discourse. She underlines the way in which the teacher-student roles may be imposed by the professional defined identity of the teacher and how the difference on what is expected and what gets done is reflected upon the participants to the interaction. In her research, the author uses a multi-method approach, combining participants’ interactions with peoples’ reflexive accounts over time and ethnographic observations on the data from other professionals and a multi-method of analyses. This is done with the intention to identify what kind of identities students construct inside and outside the classroom and how those identities relate to their prescribed roles as students. In the second contribution (“Identity-Work in Appellate Oral Argument: Ideological Identities within a Professional One”), the author (Karen Tracy) debates on how oral argument discourse enacts and reflects the professional identity of US State Supreme Court judges. Through corpus analysis, it can be observed that the identity of an appellate judge is constructed by means of three types of coordinated discourse moves: frame-constructing actions, lexical and speech act cues and relational definers, and that the judges’ ideological identities are constructed by use of certain discourse practices.

The following article (“Engaging Identities: Personal Disclosure and Professional Responsibility”), by Keith Richards, builds on the idea proposed by Koester (2004) that the relational dimension is of high importance as concerns workplace interaction and explores some of the interactional consequences of suppressing a potentially relevant identity and the relationship related to it. The analytical framework of this study grounds on applied Conversation Analysis and Membership Categorisation Analysis that offers a means of understanding ways in

which participants orient to more explicit features of the social order. With no intention of making generalizations, the research suggests that identity constructions may be in some circumstances the product of the ‘cognitive’ self.

In the last contribution to the volume (““We are not there. In fact now we will go to the garden to take the rain”: Researcher Identity and the Observer’s Paradox”) Anna de Fina argues that the social constructionist oriented research needs to be expanded to include a particular domain in which professional identities play a role: the research context, which has been absent from identity studies. The corpus analysis confirmed that research interviews and events are communicative events in their own right, having their own participation frameworks and dynamics. Thus, the professional identities of interviewers as researchers are often questioned, oriented to and even negotiated in the interactions.

The merits of the book rely mostly in the valuable and diverse approaches it comprises, ranging from the social constructionist perspective to the close-up view accessible through conversation analysis and the quantitative analysis proposed by corpus linguistics. The fact that some of the articles included in the volume concentrate on small, isolated or unusual data as compared to other, leads to the situation that the result cannot be extrapolated or generalized, which could be considered a shortcoming.

Due to the dual approaches to identity construction processes: both general and specific, the target public of the book is represented both by language researchers and scholars from the field of social sciences.

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*About the reviewer*

**Monica (Ardeleanu) Gomoescu** is a PhD student at *Transilvania* University of Braşov. Her research interests include Pragmatics and Communication, and her publications concern the use of vague language (general extenders), identity construction, and the use of politeness strategies in political and medical discourses.