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## Social cognition, social power and social discourse

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### *Abstract*

*This interdisciplinary paper proposes a theoretical framework for the study of the relationships between cognition, power and discourse, illustrated on the example of racist attitudes and conversations. It is argued that cognitions have important social dimensions, to be accounted for in a theory of social cognition. However, current approaches to social cognition lack both an explicit cognitive theory of the structures and processes of social representations, and a proper social theory for the acquisition and uses of such cognitions in social situations and social macrostructures. It is shown how the structures and strategies of ethnic prejudices can be made explicit in terms of general cognitive attitude schemata and concrete situation models, and how these structures are conditioned by their social functions. Discourse about ethnic minorities is monitored by these schemata and models, as well as by models of communicative contexts, which explain the strategic nature of such talk (I'm not a racist, but . . .). More generally, it is argued that the social power of dominant groups and their members can be expressed, enacted or legitimated in discourse only through ideologically framed social cognitions.*

### Problems

This paper sketches some of the relationships between cognition, power and discourse, with illustrations mainly taken from my ongoing research on the racist representation of ethnic minority groups in memory and discourse.

One major argument that will be developed here is that the links between cognition, power and discourse should (also) be framed in terms of the social

dimensions of these three notions. This may be obvious for the essentially social or political nature of the notion of power, and the same may be true for language use and discourse, but we also need a more social approach for cognition. Cognitive processes and representations are not 'pure' mental phenomena of individual people, but also have important social dimensions, which have been neglected in cognitive psychology. The acquisition, representation and use of knowledge and beliefs take place in social situations, and mostly by people functioning as members of social groups, often in social institutions and against the background of other societal (macro) structures. The assumption is that this social embedding of cognitive processes affects the nature of these processes as well as the contents and the structures of mental representations.

The rapid developments during the last decade of the field now commonly called 'social cognition', studied mostly within the discipline of social psychology, suggest that this idea is hardly new (Fiske and Taylor, 1984; Wyer and Srull, 1984). However, if we read through the literature on social cognition, we find that the cognitive dimension is given extensive attention, whereas the social aspects of cognition tend to be neglected. Social psychologists have (re-)discovered cognitive psychology in their accounts of familiar problems and domains, such as attitudes, persuasion, attribution and intergroup processes. Notions such as schemata and similar concepts from what could be called the 'structuralist' approach within the information processing paradigm, have become familiar in the analysis of various types of social representations.

We have no quarrel with a serious and explicit analysis of the structures and strategies of social representations, and this analysis presupposes the theoretical instrumenta of cognitive sciences such as cognitive psychology, Artificial Intelligence, linguistics, philosophy and logic. Unfortunately, the popularity of catch-all notions such as 'schema' has not always been a guarantee for serious theoretical advances in social psychology. On the contrary, the uses of the relevant terms have often been superficial and sloppy. Talking about group-schemata or self-schemata, among other things, may explain in very general terms how people perceive, interpret and act upon other people and their actions, but such explanations need further analysis of the exact structures and strategies involved. More than half a century after Bartlett's (1932) innovative use of the notion of 'schema', we may expect social psychology to go beyond intuitive applications of this notion. Very few studies of social cognition actually spell out the contents and the organization of social schemata, nor do they formulate the processing steps that lead to or

from such representations in memory. In other words, despite this cognitive (re)turn in social psychology, the study of social cognition needs a more explicit cognitive framework.

More serious, however, is the neglect of the other face of the Janus head of social psychology, *viz.*, the embedding of individuals and cognitive processes within the frameworks of social interaction, social groups and social structure. It would have been desirable if social psychology had taught a few things about this social 'context' of the mirad to the cognitive scientist, but for this, an orientation not only to the cognitive, but also to the (other) social sciences is necessary.

One of the arguments for this state of affairs, namely, that information about people, groups, actions, and communication is processed much like information about any other object of cognition may be true, but it is not the whole truth. What social psychology could have contributed is a more explicit insight into how exactly knowledge, beliefs, or other (social) cognitions are acquired and used, and how mental representations and processes systematically develop and operate as a function of social constraints. More interaction with micro and macro sociologies could have provided some new ideas and more impetus to such a specific role of social psychology. In sum: the theory of social cognition should not only be about cognition, or about people as information processors, but also about society, and about people as social members. This aim is frequently invoked in the first pages of social psychology textbooks, but seldom realized in practice.

Admittedly, some of these principles have influenced much European social psychology of the past decade, especially that of Tajfel and his colleagues (see e.g., Tajfel, 1978, 1981, 1982; Farr and Moscovici, 1984; Turner and Giles, 1981). Our knowledge of intra- and intergroup processes, in particular, has benefitted enormously from this research. But even in this seminal work, the main focus has been directed towards psychological notions, such as categorization, differentiation and polarization, whereas the groups studied were often arbitrary or artificial and seldom real social groups. Important social (sociological) notions, such as power and dominance, institutional control, class relations and ideology, at the macro-level, and their correlates at the micro-level of interaction, have remained mostly unanalyzed from a socio-psychological point of view. (The same is true for obviously 'cognitive' concepts in microsociology, such as interpretation by group members, commonsense strategies, rules and 'methods'. Despite the interest in issues such as prejudice, intergroup competition and conflict, the social dimensions of

these notions rarely inspired this paradigm in social psychology. At the same time, the cognitive analysis of the representations and processes involved in the psychological notions used in that research also remained at a rather unsophisticated level. So, even here we meet the familiar predicament of social psychology: theoretically it lags behind, both from a cognitivist and from a sociological point of view.

Similar remarks hold, of course, for sociology, where the cognitive notions just mentioned have usually remained unanalyzed, left to the psychologist, or simply banned as being too 'mentalistic'. The call for a more cognitive sociology, e.g. by Cicourel (1973), has gone largely unheeded, despite the role of understanding in many directions in present-day sociology.

Thus, we see that both social psychology and microsociology seem to fail in at least part of their important task. They are scholarly neighbors who largely ignore each other, despite vast fields of common interest, such as the analysis of social cognition, interaction, communication, discourse and the social situations of their functional contextualization.

#### Aims

Of course, this paper, and its programmatic statements, cannot redress this bias alone. We focus on a few more specific issues, which by themselves, however, cover a lot of ground. The first angle for this specific focus is language and discourse. Language use and its various types of discursive manifestation, whether spoken or written, typically embodies both dimensions of the social cognition approach. Meaning, interpretation, understanding and production of text and talk cannot be seriously analyzed outside a cognitive framework (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983). To be sure, many linguists and psychologists have tried to do so, but their failure, especially in its behaviorist excesses, has been exemplary in the field. At the same time, two decades of sociolinguistics have shown that language is also and essentially a social phenomenon, and that discourse is a crucial form of social interaction. Text and talk in many ways exhibit their social embedding, e.g., through the social positions or categorizations of language users as social (group) members, and through the contextualization of language use in specific social situations and institutions. Also these statements have become obvious, if not trivial.

However, the gap between the cognitive and the social is not bridged here either. Socio- and psycholinguists seldom meet, and seldom speak to or

about each other. In this respect, they reproduce the biases of their 'mother' disciplines. Cognitive processes of language use are seldom analyzed in the perspective of what these 'uses' amount to from a social point of view. Conversely, few sociolinguists or microsociologists dealing with verbal interaction and conversation show *how* group membership or social situations can affect, or be affected by, properties of discourse. Obviously, group, class or institutions by themselves cannot directly be connected to such linguistic or textual features. Indeed, interpretation, understanding, categories, common sense, procedures, strategies, and similar structures and processes are involved, and these are not merely of a social nature but are also cognitive, and so their cognitive analysis is also necessary. In this paper, then, the social nature of discourse is approached within the framework of social cognition.

To further focus our discussion, and to balance the cognitive bias of social cognition, we have added the essentially social dimension of power. We want to analyze some of the mechanisms of how social power is manifested, enacted, represented, or legitimated by means of text and talk. During the last decade, some branches of sociolinguistics have paid attention to this problem (Fowler, Hodge, Kress and Trew, 1979; Kramarae, Shulz and O'Barr, 1984; Mey, 1985). The power of speakers who are members of dominant groups or classes, or who occupy institutional positions, has thus been studied in terms of specific forms of language use, such as particular speech acts, turn-taking dominance in conversation, or the control of topic and style. In this important way, insights are being contributed also to the micro enactment and organization of social power, and not only to the linguistic or discursive variation and functionality of language use.

But again, there is an important theoretical and empirical gap in such studies. Power, no less than other dimensions of social structure and process, does not and cannot affect discourse directly, but does so through language users, and therefore through cognitive processes, that is, through social cognitions. Social cognitions allow language users to form and use their representations of social groups, classes, institutions and their relationships, also those of dominance and power. It is not power itself, but rather its shared or contested representations in social cognitions of group members which provide the link that connects social power with social discourse. From the point of view of cognitive sociology this may again be trivial, but what matters is that we draw the right conclusions and opt for the adequate approaches that follow from such a statement of principle. In this paper, therefore, we intend to discuss the relationship between power and dis-

course through the essential link of social cognition (see also van Dijk, 1988). This does not mean that we want discourse analysis and social analysis to be (more) cognitive, but also, or rather, that we want cognitive analysis to be more social. Interdisciplinary research of this nature is fruitful only when it avoids the one-way streets between the disciplines. It should seriously attempt to integrate the relevant complex notions in a coherent and independent theoretical framework. Only in this way can such research contribute to, instead of simply follow, the understanding of crucial phenomena, such as cognitive processes and power, traditionally studied exclusively in their respective mother disciplines.

#### Approaches

With these undoubtedly somewhat ambitious aims in mind, we present some fragments of a theoretical framework that might link cognition, discourse and power. This framework will serve to discuss some results of recent research, both by others and by myself, about the nature of this link.

Assuming, then, a theoretical perspective on discourse and power from the point of view of a truly interdisciplinary study of social cognition, taken both as a mental and a social phenomenon, let us start with the cognitive dimension.

The analysis of social cognitions can take two related, but different directions. One direction would be generalistic, and maintain that *all* cognitions are (also) social, and that therefore there is no point in speaking about specific social cognitions, to be differentiated from other, non-social (personal, individual, universal?) cognitions. The reasoning and evidence behind such a claim are rather persuasive: all concepts, categories, complex representations, as well as the processes of their manipulation, are acquired and used mostly in social contexts of perception, interpretation and interaction. That is, learning is essentially social, and so are knowledge and beliefs, even when 'applied' in personal experiences. Knowledge of the language, of the physical world, of ourselves, and a *fortiori* of others and the social world, cannot in principle be purely individual, private, isolated, or solipsistic. One branch of research in this paradigm has been (inspired by) research in Soviet psychology (e.g. Vygotsky, 1962).

The second perspective is more particularistic, and conceives of social cognitions rather in terms of specific kinds of cognition, *viz.*, these related to the social world. This has been the direction of research most commonly

associated with the study of social cognition (Fiske and Taylor, 1984; Wyer and Srull, 1984). In this case, the focus is on group representations, social attitudes and persuasion, self-presentation strategies, or social attributions of different kinds. Such cognitions are analyzed much in the same way as cognitions of the non-social phenomena of the physical or mental world, such as objects, colors, shapes, or relationships. The force of this perspective lies in the persuasive argument that it is unlikely that our cognitive (let alone our physiological or neurological) 'software' runs completely different programs for social and non-social information processing. Interestingly, the radical brand of this view agrees with the radical social conception of the mind on one point, namely on the unified, non-specific nature of information processing.

Even when this argument may be accepted, others within this same perspective may hold that, despite the common mental apparatus of social and non-social cognitions, we also need autonomous analysis of social cognitions as specific cognitions about social phenomena, such as interaction, groups, institutions and their processes and relationships. That is, we do not only want to know how people perceive or think about trees and tables, but also about men and women, ingroups and outgroups, power and oppression, and essentially how people plan and execute their (inter)actions on the basis of such representations. Such processes may be assumed to be specific because of the central role of the social self in these interpretations and representations. This variant of the second approach, which partly overlaps with the first one in its special interest in the social dimensions of cognition, favors special treatment of social cognitions. Unlike in the first approach, however, the instruments used for this analysis may be borrowed from cognitive psychology or AI.

As usual, these various directions and perspectives of theory formation and research hold different fragmenta of the truth. On the one hand, there are probably cognitive fundamentals, partly deriving from the structure of the human brain, which presuppose the architecture of memory as well as the basic properties and constraints of any type of information processing. On the other hand, at another level of analysis, it is also true that cognitions are acquired and mostly used in social contexts, and it is reasonable to assume that this will affect their contents and even their structures and processing. Hence, social perception and interaction need special attention and analysis, that is, theoretical instruments lacking in a purely cognitive approach. The

question is how such different perspectives on the complex 'interface' between cognition and society can be integrated into a unified theory.

### **Theory fragments: discourse, power and racism**

Instead of continuing this theoretical discussion at the highly abstract level of the fundamental principles of cognitive and social processes, we focus on a more specific domain, *viz.*, the analysis of discourse and power. By way of concrete example, we examine the power relations between racial or ethnic groups, as cognitively represented in White ethnic attitudes and prejudices, and socially embedded in the context of racism, on the one hand, and on the discursive expression, enactment, or legitimation of these forms of intergroup dominance, on the other hand. In light of what has been said before, this analysis suggests that the cognitive representations of other groups, for instance in terms of prejudices, are being formed, structured, manipulated and used as a function of their role in intra- and intergroup interaction within a racist society. The same is true for the structures and functions of discourse in these cognitive and social processes. People manifest their social cognitions by expressing their prejudices or enacting their racially biased plans also in text and talk, whereas their discourses are shaped under the constraints of verbal interaction, group norms and values, and other properties of the social context. Obviously, these social constraints are able to influence interactions only if they are themselves cognitively represented by social members. We see that also in the analysis of prejudice and racism, the cognitive and the social mutually presuppose each other. There is no serious cognitive analysis, e.g., of prejudice, without consideration of its social functions, and no full understanding of racist discourse and discrimination without an analysis of their cognitive mediation.

At the same time, and at a broader or higher (macro) level of analysis, cognitions, interactions and social contexts of racism are embedded in a social power structure. Power defines the nature of the historical, social, cultural and political relationships between Blacks and Whites, and between minority and majority groups in general. It is realized through discrimination or other forms of oppression, including racist talk and text, and conversely, for racial or ethnic power and its realizations to be planned and executed at the micro-level of everyday situations, or to be recognized and resisted, it must also be represented cognitively, for instance as a crucial

dimension or category in group representations. This special dimension necessarily influences the production of discourse, for instance through the choice of specific speech acts, topics, style or schematic structures. Similarly, specific attributions of reasons or agency may lead to the well-known discursive and social strategy by White group members of 'blaming the victim': Blacks are thought to be less successful, e.g. in education or business, because they lack sufficient motivation, or because they have been raised in a 'culture of poverty'.

With this first, tentative step of theoretical analysis, we see emerging the (still vague) contours of a picture of how cognition, power and discourse may be related. Obviously, discourse is a crucial but nevertheless optional party in this triad: power may also be exercised through other social interactions, and cognitions need not always be expressed or depend on verbal interaction. Yet, discourse plays a role that goes beyond its type of social interaction among many others, both for social cognition and for power. In fact, most cognitions are formed and can become social only through discourse, and most of them can become shared in the group, as social cognitions, only through the many forms of text and talk of our society. The same is true for what 'we' know and think about 'them'. Most white people in Western societies only know about black people or other ethnic minority groups through verbal communication, not (primarily) through perception and interaction.

A similar perspective is relevant for the analysis of power. Power — and hence racism — can be enacted through many forms of action, also through physical or economic force. However, in our societies, most types of power are expressed, enacted or legitimated through discourse, and not only through threats, warnings or other direct references to physical force or retaliation in case of non-compliance (Galbraith, 1985; Lukes, 1986; Mueller, 1973). On the contrary, the more pervasive while more subtle and effective forms of power are those of persuasion, dissimulation and deceit. Compliance may be obtained through biased argumentation, stylistic and rhetorical tricks, and especially through carefully managed information (Billig, 1987). Today, discourse directed to, or about, ethnic minorities is seldom overtly racist in the sense of explicitly expressed White supremacy (Barker, 1981; Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986). On the contrary, many types of text and talk (and their speakers) appear to support the general norms against prejudice, discrimination and racism (see Billig, *the issue*, and van Dijk, 1984, 1987a). In more indirect and subtle ways, however, power may be exercised implicitly, for instance by apparently reasonable arguments, 'objective facts', and mostly by

censoring important topics or information. In sum: the analysis of power and racism not only needs a macro-level conceptualization of social, cultural, historical or economic factors, but also an important micro-level inquiry into cognitive and discursive structures and strategies.

#### *The cognitive framework*

The cognitive framework that underlies these processes of power, racism and discourse, cannot be spelled out in detail here. For non-psychologists, a few major points of that framework must be summarized here before embarking on a more detailed theoretical analysis of social cognitions and discourse processes in the context of racism (for details, see van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983):

1. Understanding and memorization of events, (inter)action or discourse involves strategic processes of perception, analysis and interpretation. This means that such processes operate 'on line', at different levels of analysis, and with the use of both external (data-driven) and internal (knowledge-driven) information. In other words, such processes aim at fast, effective, context-dependent, goal-directed, subjective and flexible forms of interpretation. Note that the criterion of context dependency involves the important condition of social relevance.
2. These processes take place in Short Term Memory (STM), which has limited storage capacity, *viz.*, a handful of meaningful or structured units (letters, words, propositions). The major task of STM is to interpret, *i.e.* to assign meaning to, incoming information carriers (signals), an interpretation that strategically cooperates with a formal analysis of such information. For discourse, this typically means the combined formal analysis of clauses or sentences and their interpretation in terms of propositions. The same is true, however, for the interpretation of (inter)action, events, people and whole situations.
3. Information thus analyzed and interpreted is gradually stored in the episodic memory 'department' (EM) of Long Term Memory (LTM), *viz.*, as specific forms of representation, such as a Text Representation for discourse. However, while interpreting discourse, people do not primarily aim at a representation of the discourse itself, but rather at the representation of what the discourse was 'about', that is, some event or situation. These representations are called (situation) models (see also

Johnson-Laird, 1983; van Dijk, 1987e). Understanding, thus, means that people are able to build a possible model of a situation. Often, building such a model involves the updating of 'old' models, e.g., when we read the newspaper about political events we have read about before. Models embody our personal, subjective knowledge about the situation, and therefore not only feature subjectively interpreted new information, but also knowledge and beliefs derived from our earlier experiences, including evaluative beliefs (opinions). Reading about Nicaragua in the paper gives us new information, activates what we already knew and what opinions we already had (old models), and may thus lead to the formation of new opinions about the situation in that country.

4. People not only build models of the situations they perceive, participate in or read and hear about, but also of the communicative situation itself. That is, in conversational interaction, people activate, build or update models about themselves and other speech participants, about their actual goals and interests, about the social norms, values and rules that apply in the communicative situation, and so on. This communicative model, which is continually updated with new context information, monitors understanding and the process of verbal interaction. It plays a central role in the strategies of prejudiced talk we examine below.
5. At the same time, both the interpretation processes as well as the construction of models are supported by more general, socially shared knowledge, such as frames and scripts (Schank and Abelson, 1977). We apply scripts about civil war or terrorism when we understand stories about the activities of the Contras in Nicaragua, and build updated models of such events. In other words, models also feature actualized fragments of scripts and other general, but culturally variable, social knowledge. The same is true for concrete opinions. These are derived from general social attitudes, which are shared within the same social or political group. Thus, building models of situations is influenced not only by scripts but also by dominant (group) attitudes. In other words; models represent not only our knowledge of an event, but also our personal and social relationships towards such an event.
6. General attitudes, which are essentially group-based, may in turn be organized by ideologies. These ideologies define the internal structures (e.g., of relevance) and the mutual coherence of social attitudes and feature the basic norms, values, goals and interests group members use in social information processing. In other words, ideologies define what

may be called the 'foundation' of the social cognitions of group members. Given their abstractness, ideologies only manifest themselves indirectly, *viz.*, through general attitudes and their general opinions, which in turn influence the concrete models which determine action and discourse.

7. Finally, all the processes mentioned above are monitored at a higher level by a dynamic, permanently changing, Control System. This system keeps track of current scripts and attitudes, current communication models, current topics, and current speech acts being engaged in. It regulates attention allocation and information flow between different memory stores, (de-)activates models and scripts when necessary, and calls on the locally relevant strategic operations of understanding or production.

### *Social cognition*

With this sketch of the cognitive framework we may now continue the theoretical discussion about the links between cognition, discourse and power. The links between discourse and cognition have been dealt with above. Discourse understanding is a strategic process in which surface structure data (and context information) are analyzed and interpreted, stored in episodic memory as text representations, which are related to new or old models of situations. The same is true for discourse production, which is based on the formulation of fragments of situation models and on the relevant information in models of the communicative situation, which makes text and talk relevant and strategically effective. These processes need vast amounts of socially shared knowledge and beliefs, *viz.*, those of a specific group or culture.

Here the first social dimension of discourse processing appears. Meanings assigned to discourse, or any references tied to the models people have 'in mind' while understanding, crucially depend on what is assumed to be true or possible in a given culture. In this respect also knowledge is a form of social cognition.

Discourse understanding also involves opinions and attitudes — two classical notions from social psychology (see e.g., Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). In our framework they appear in two ways, so as to avoid the well-known theoretical problems of traditional attitude theory (see e.g., Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Particular opinions about individual events are part of the models

people build of situations. Such opinions may be a mixture or combination of purely personal opinions, derived from personal experiences (old models), but more often than not they reflect more general opinions, stored in socially shared attitudes of (sub-)groups of social members. What people think about ethnic minorities, immigration, abortion, nuclear energy, or civil war in Central America is stored in such attitude schemata, and particular opinions about concrete events are derived from such attitudes. Attitudes are group-based. They are gradually built up through communication and other forms of interaction with other group members. They are expressed, discussed, contested, argued for, defended, attacked and in general normalized in many ways in different forms of discursive communication.

The interplay between general, socially shared opinions as they are organized in attitudes, on the one hand, and of particular, context-dependent, opinions, on the other hand, allows for the necessary strategic flexibility often observed in people's opinions. That is, people may use their general opinions (and their underlying ideologies, norms and values) in such a way that apparent contradictions appear in their discursive expression of opinions (see Potter and Wetherell, 1987, and in this issue). During the evaluation of events, people may build different models, featuring different perspectives, and different opinions of the 'same' event, even when their general opinions, just like general knowledge, may remain fairly constant across different contexts.

Without this more general notion of attitude we are unable to describe or explain the socially shared, and relatively stable opinions and ideologies people have about social groups and social structures, for instance ethnic prejudices. Thus, whereas such prejudices are relatively constant (although they may change over time), concrete ethnic opinions and their discursive expression will also depend on the specific context. Such concrete opinions may appear to be at variance with the general opinions of prejudiced attitudes, because they may also depend on other general attitudes or ideological principles (e.g., social norms of equality or tolerance), as well as on the aims of the current context model. Discursive strategies of face-keeping and positive self-presentation in talk about minorities (I'm not a racist, but . . .), are typical manifestations of this complex and apparently ambivalent process of social cognition.

At this point we have made another step in our theoretical argument, namely, the establishment of a link between cognition and discourse. After a brief analysis of the general cognitive processes of discourse understanding and production, we have found that these processes are imbued, at all levels,

with social cognitions. The social dimension and theoretical specificity of these cognitions appeared to be derived from their shared, group-based nature and their ideological foundations. At the same time, discourse itself appears to be both cognitive, *viz.*, because of the processes of interpretation and representation, as well as social *viz.*, because of its manifestation as social interaction and communication.

### **Discourse and racism**

This approach to social cognition and discourse is particularly relevant in the analysis of White group power and racism. When writing or speaking to, or about, ethnic minorities, White dominant group members may do several things (see van Dijk, 1987a, for details): **(1)** they express their personal experiences or opinions, as represented in their models of 'ethnic situations', for instance in stories about an event in their neighborhood, or an event they have seen on **TV**, or **(2)** they directly express more general ethnic opinions, e.g., 'Many of them are criminals', 'They cheat on social welfare', or 'They are always being helped by the authorities'. Since models are influenced by scripts and attitudes, their contents and structures will be shaped in accordance with such shared representations, though with personal variations and exceptions, depending on own experiences, i.e., old models. Generally, this means that situation perception, analysis and representation, whether directly observed or heard or read about, will be 'biased' in the same way. Much recent work on social cognition and stereotypes precisely makes that point, and shows what these 'biases' may amount to: (over-) generalization, polarization, attribution errors, illusory correlations, selective attention and recall, and, in general, strategies that tend to seek and attend to information that confirms existing prejudices (see the papers in Hamilton, 1981).

Inconsistent information may also be attended to, but in that case rather with the intention to reject it, argue against it, or to protest against it. Such processes of 'refutation' may also contribute to — at least short term — better memorization of conflicting information. We sometimes know and remember rather well what our enemies think and say. However, although this information may be known and well memorized, it does not monitor and organize our social representations in the way that our own attitudes and derived opinions do. In other words, subjective point of view, especially when

socially shared with other group members, presumably has a potent organizing force in social information processing.

We conclude that social representations such as attitudes about other groups strategically control our construction of models, and hence also our production and understanding of discourse, or the participation in other forms of social interaction. Clusters of such social representations about other ethnic groups may be organized further by ideological frameworks. Typically, negative attitudes about specific ethnic minority groups often hold for minority groups in general. This allows fast attitude formation about new outgroups. Such was the case, for instance, when Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka came to the Netherlands in early 1985. Most Dutch people had never heard of Tamils before, but after a public panic orchestrated by the authorities and the conservative press, this did not prevent them from soon expressing prejudices that were strikingly similar to those formed for other minority groups (van Dijk, 1987c).

At still higher levels of abstraction, such attitudes may in turn cohere with attitudes about other social groups and phenomena, for instance about women, about the anti-nuclear movements, and so on. Ideological analysis has as its main task the reconstruction of such frameworks, and of such principles of social attitude organization and coherence (Billig, 1982). In our opinion, this is one of the major tasks of the theory of social representations in the years ahead.

According to sociological analyses of ideology, which usually neglect such a cognitive approach, such social representations are intimately conditioned by group interests (CCCS, 1978; Kinloch, 1981; Therborn, 1980). That is, generally speaking, people adopt those opinions, and develop those attitudes, that favor interpretations or underly actions that not only are consistent with their preferred norms, values, or goals, but which also realize both personal and group (or class) interests. Thus, it is in the best interests of white people to keep black people 'out' and 'clown', if only to arrive ahead in real or imagined competition — for space, housing, employment, social benefits and education — and in order to keep control in everyday situations of social interactions (Essed, 1984, 1986, this issue). Similarly, the functional theory of prejudice holds that negative ethnic opinions are developed in such a way that White discriminatory practices that sustain and continue racial inequality are most effectively planned, legitimated, and accepted by the dominant group and its members. In that sense, prejudices are 'useful' for the group as a whole (Allport, 1954; Levin and Levin, 1982; Tajfel, 1981).

The same is true for the social discourse involved in the expression, confirmation, defense, legitimation or denial of such practices and their underlying interest-bound social cognitions. In this respect, talk and thought are intimately linked in the representation and social communication of prejudice, and hence in the reproduction of racism (van Dijk, 1984, 1987a).

If this is true, we should be able to make a next theoretical step, namely that not only the contents, but also the structures and strategies of social representation are designed in such a way that they optimally realize or reflect group goals and interests. Not only *what* we think about minorities, but also *how* we think about 'them' becomes a characteristic feature of social representations. We have found some evidence for this assumption in the structures and strategies of discourse: not only what we say, but also how we do so, may tell us something about underlying cognitive strategies as well as about the most effective reproduction of prejudice and racism in society. For instance, disclaimers, such as a semantic move of a denial (I'm not a racist, but . . .), may be one of the formal strategic means that allows the normatively 'acceptable' expression and diffusion of ethnic prejudices or of stories biased by such social cognitions (see the other papers in this issue).

Thus, on the one hand, the organization of prejudiced representations reflects the general principles of cognitive architecture, such as hierarchical structure and categorical articulation, which allow fast and effective, that is, strategic search and application in model building in concrete situations. However, as Condor (this issue) shows, general principles of social information processing are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions of ethnic prejudice. On the contrary, social cognitions about other groups are used and 'needed' for very particular social tasks in specific historical, economic and socio-cultural contexts, and it is most likely that these uses also require adequate pre-programming at a structural level. In our work on White prejudice we have assumed that representations of ethnic minority groups are organized by a fixed 'schema', featuring categories such as Origin, Appearance, Goals, Culture and Personality (van Dijk, 1984, 1987a). That is, people's beliefs and opinions about ethnic groups or immigrants are organized and summarized by such questions as: Where do they come from, What do they look like, What are they doing here, What kind of (group) culture do they have, and What kind of personality do their members have? Evidence derived from many interviews conducted both in Amsterdam and in San Diego seems to confirm that these are indeed the kinds of information people attend to in 'ethnic situations', and use to organize their talk about 'them'.

Note that these categories have eminent social relevance for the dominant or autochthonous group. Information about origin essentially defines the crucial distinction between in- and outgroup, between 'us' and 'them foreigners', between people from here' and people from 'there'. This information is intimately linked with information about Appearance, which distinguishes people who look like us from people who look different, information that is relevant for categorization in everyday perception and social encounters. These are the fundamental categories for group perception and differentiation. Goals is a category that organizes socio-economic information (beliefs and opinions) about other groups, and pertains to the size of the group, their work, and their social position. This category stores the large set of prejudices about 'competition', e.g. for space, housing, employment and social benefits. At this level, the groups are not merely presented as 'different', but possibly as a direct 'threat' to our interests. The same is true for the other categories. The cultural category stores beliefs and opinions about language, norms, values, habits, and other typical group features, and also organizes many types of prejudice, summarized in everyday talk or in the media by the more or less benign phrase 'They have a different way of living', or more negatively as 'They are a threat to our culture'. Finally, the personality category organizes the information about assumed prototypical features of outgroup members that are relevant in everyday action, e.g., about the aggressive, criminal, or other characteristic properties attributed to minorities. Together with the cultural properties, these personality characteristics are, on the one hand, used to 'understand' or explain the actions of ethnic minority groups, but, on the other hand are applied in 'acceptable' reasoning in favor of derogation and discrimination.

Thus, dominant group interests and the conditions of everyday inter- and intragroup perception, interaction and discourse in racist societies shape the nature of social representations about minority groups. Depending on the specific dominant subgroup (or class), the relevance or position of such categories may be variable, according to the most vital interests that appear to be threatened. Thus, white working-class people have prejudices that are partly different from those of middle-class people or the leading elites (Phizacklea and Miles, 1980). In fact, the elites may have more prominent norms, goals and interests that favor the very denial or dissimulation of ethnic prejudice (van Dijk, 1987d; Billig, this issue). Their talk often appears more 'tolerant', also because their objective interests are less often perceived to be threatened (Wellman, 1977). One of the consequences is that poor

white working-class people sometimes perceive the elites as 'friends' of minorities. They often resent that the politicians 'don't do anything against immigration', or 'that minorities are always getting special favors'.

Research and experiences of racism by minority group members consistently show however that much elite tolerance' may well derive from a more prominent awareness of the anti-discrimination norm (Essed, this issue; Billig, this issue). More specifically, liberals will be highly concerned about their 'progressive' social image. In conversation, this awareness and concern typically emerge in strategic positive self-presentation, e.g., by pronounced denials of racism. This does not imply that their ethnic representations are less prejudiced, but at most suggests that they are organized in a different way (see the contributions in Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986). After all, those racist decisions and activities that affect minority groups most seriously, e.g. in the fields of immigration, employment, housing, education, welfare, culture and the media, are decisions made by the elite. Also, elite actors may and do use popular racism to legitimate their own (denied) racism in keeping minorities out and down.

#### *Social structure and social cognition*

These arguments suggest that the practices of the White dominant group and the structures of a racist society are reflected in the contents and the structures of social representations about minority groups. At the same time, the social position of the dominant White subgroups also shapes the particular contents, structures and strategies of more specific prejudiced representations and information processing. Some categories may be more central or relevant, depending on social class, or even on other social dimensions, such as gender. For instance, also our interview data suggest that senior citizens are often more concerned about their safety, and therefore tend to pay special attention to personality dimensions of foreigners (They are criminal?), whereas women in that case specifically attend to and remember stories about male aggression. Similarly, intellectuals may be more concerned with (assumed) cultural differences, such as language use, social norms (e.g., the position of women), family structure (and its 'pathologies'), or educational or job (under-) achievement, focusing especially on those points where minorities are 'backward'. Note that in all these cases, not only the 'contents' of the prejudices matter, but also their structural location and prominence, as well as the

strategies of their application in the formation of models, and hence in the discursive expression of such models. Positive self-presentation holds, in principle, for all group members (Goffman, 1959, 1967), but the moral interests of elites who perceive themselves as liberals' are more conducive to social strategies, especially in talk, that show that they have 'nothing against them'. It is not surprising, therefore, that the better educated consistently appear more 'tolerant' in survey research and even in interviews about ethnic attitudes. Research about experiences of minority group members with elite racism shows what attitudes must be assumed below such layers of social self-control and self-presentation (Essed, this issue).

We now have a somewhat more detailed picture of the relationships between social cognition, discourse and power. Power differences based on social inequality and oppression generally tend to be maintained and reproduced by those in power. This may be power embodied in the socio-economics of class, race or ethnicity. This very structure of social organization is partly known to all social members and hence represented in social representations. This is the first link between power and cognition.

Next, for social power to be reproduced, many daily actions must be accomplished that enact, express, or legitimate these power relationships. These actions themselves need to be planned, executed and understood. That is, they need a cognitive basis, consisting of models, scripts, attitudes and their organizing ideologies. This is the more indirect, second link between power and cognition.

In the reproduction of ethnic or racial power, prejudices — and in general racist ideologies (also the more subtle ones) — play an important role. We have shown that they strategically monitor people's interpretation of ethnic events in the form of 'biased' models. Important here is that such models appear to be consistent also with prevailing norms and values of the dominant group. That is, interpretations of, and interactions with ethnic minority groups must appear to be legitimate. If foreigners are seen as 'stealing our jobs', it is easier to accept, though often unwittingly, that they are fired, not hired, or do not get the education needed to compete on the job market in the first place. If they are perceived as 'not belonging here', they may more easily be denied entrance, residence, and equal rights or thought to engage in 'unfair' competition. And so on. In other words, the mechanisms of social power and inequality in many ways influence contents, structures and strategies of prejudiced social representations.

**Power, cognition and discourse**

These arguments bring us back to the role of discourse and its link to both social cognition and power. If power must be reproduced, and if social representations and their organizing ideologies sustain that reproduction, they must also themselves be reproduced. This is implicitly the case by social actions themselves, and the power of the consensus that continues or condones them. However, more is needed. Both social actions and social cognitions need to be explicitly formulated, expressed, referred to, described, explained, prescribed, normalized, defended, and legitimated in many ways (Berger, 1985; Mueller, 1973; Roloff and Berger, 1982). This happens in everyday talk, in institutional texts, in the media, in law, in the courtrooms, in government or parliamentary debates, in propaganda, in advertising, in directives, in policy documents, in socialization discourse, in textbooks, movies, TV-programs, comics, and a myriad of other discourse forms that form the symbolic framework of power and ideologies 'in action' (Fowler, 1985; Kramarae, Shulz, and O'Barr, 1984; van Dijk, 1988). In other words, discourse in our society is the essential communicative dimension of power. Through discourse, people 'learn' how to acquire, maintain, or accept power, and even more crucially, through discourse they develop and communicate the ideologically framed social cognitions that legitimate power.

Thus, maybe less concretely than in some other forms of action, but probably more effectively and faster, social group members need discourse and communication to learn about social structure, about their positions in social structure, and about their (lack of) power. Conversely, discourse allows them to express and persuasively convey such social understandings of positions of power. This is how and why white people routinely talk about 'foreigners' in the neighborhood, the city or the country. This is how social representations, and prejudices, get communicated in the first place. This is how White dominance is explained and denied, but at the same time indirectly confirmed and legitimated, and just as racist cognitions are structurally shaped and used as a function of their societal relevance, so racist discourse is structured in many ways by similar functions.

However, we have emphasized that this link between social power structures and their manifestation in discourse cannot be direct. Because discourse structures are produced (and analyzed and understood) cognitively, the manifestation of power in discourse is also under the control of (social) cognition. That is, power has no direct 'access' to discourse. It requires cognitive

mediation, e.g., through ideology, attitudes, social knowledge, and models of social situations, respectively, as well as by the strategies that link these different representations. This also holds for the so-called 'social' strategies of interaction, such as those of face keeping, self-presentation, or persuasion. Therefore a structural analysis of power as displayed in text and talk derives from its relevant 'coding' in social cognition. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, the social concept of power can be linked to the social notion of discourse only through a cognitive 'detour'. The same is true for other macro-concepts of social analysis that are brought to bear in the analysis the micro-contexts of interactions and social situations. We have illustrated this, for example, for the concept of ideology.

In order to understand the indirectness of the link between social power, and its cognitive coding, on the one hand, and discourse structures, on the other hand, we should recall that, from a cognitive point of view, a discourse is an expression or execution of models in episodic memory. Model structures thus translate into semantic representations, which in turn are expressed by syntactic and other surface structures. Part of these surface structures, such as intonation and nonverbal signals, as well as speech acts and self-presentation, are directly controlled by the communication model in episodic memory, which stores the properties of the speech participants and the relevant dimensions of the communicative context. In other words, when power is finally exhibited in text and talk, it may derive from many cognitive 'sources', such as situation models and context models, and — more indirectly — from attitudes and ideologies. This theoretical complexity has of course methodological consequences for an ideological analysis of power, and hence of prejudice and racism, 'through' discourse analysis. Let us therefore further unravel some details of these links between the structures of power, cognition and discourse.

#### *Interactional discourse control*

Immediate speaker power may be represented — by both participants — in the communication model. The consequences of such a representation may show in specific speech acts, such as commands or similar directives instead of polite requests, and more generally in the absence of markers of politeness, deference or solidarity. In conversational interaction, speaker power may be manifested in the control over turn allocation, e.g., through biased self-

selection as speaker, through interruptions, and more subtly in tone, pitch, fluency and the absence of hesitation markers (Scherer and Giles, 1979). Research shows that along this dimension men often tend to control conversations with women (Thorne, Kramarae and Henley, 1983). Such observable signals of power not only express social speaker power through conversational control, but may also serve to maintain or constitute such power in the more local context. The communication model of the hearer, subject to such control, will in that case change accordingly, and act upon such knowledge in the rest of the conversational interaction.

Similarly, social power may be expressed through the control of discourse genre. Powerful speakers may refuse to be spoken to in the first place, thus selecting or avoiding conversation, or they may prescribe what other communication genre, e.g., an official request or complaint, is appropriate. Powerful speakers may even change the rules that define the schema of conventional or institutional discourse types, e.g., those of a meeting or a court trial session. In court, defendants or witnesses must follow specific rules that specify what kind of speech acts or genres may be used. Sometimes only answers to questions are allowed. Stories of (relevant) personal experiences are only allowed when invited, but more powerful defendants may get more freedom in such cases (Wodak, 1985). Argumentation or justification may be reduced to a minimum, because they belong to the discursive power scope of the defense counsel or the prosecutor.

The same is true at the semantic level. In conversation, one of the speakers (A) may control topic and topic change in such a way that the other speaker (B) must contribute locally to the construction of a topic that expresses the models (including the opinions) of A. Thus, in the classroom or in the consultation room, topics may be set by the teacher or doctor, and students or patients have only limited freedom to initiate their own topics (Fisher and Todd, 1983; 1986). Cognitively, the consequences of such power control of topics are that less powerful speakers are only able to formulate the contents of their knowledge and belief models that are relevant for the powerful speaker. This may also have consequences at the local semantic level. Once a topic is set, local propositions must be coherent with them, so that possibly relevant information of the less powerful speaker is not activated or simply suppressed. The same may be true for the relevant opinions of such models. This analysis shows that if power is defined as a form of social control, power in discourse and communication presupposes and entails cognitive control.

Also at the level of style and rhetorical structures, models of powerful

speakers may exhibit their control of conversational interaction. Powerful speakers may expect to be addressed in a formal, deferential style, or proscribe the use of specific, for instance familiar or colloquial, lexical items by the less powerful speaker. Rhetorically, certain figures of style may be preferred or avoided, for instance mitigation, understatement or litotes in powerless speech.

Thus, at all levels of discursive interaction, powerful speakers may, through their representation as powerful social members and speakers in the communication model, indirectly control various properties of talk. Generally speaking, this means that the powerless speaker has less control, and hence less freedom, e.g., in the selection of turn, topic or style.

#### *Topical control*

Power need not necessarily be displayed and exercised against the other speech participants. It may also be expressed to people of equal social power, but relative to other people or groups, for instance when these are topics of text or talk. In this way, chauvinist men among each other may derogate women, and thus display their group power. White people who talk with other white people about black citizens may also exhibit their group power. Thus, they express the power as it is represented in their group attitudes and prejudices, and hence in the models they have about ethnic situations. Differentiation and polarization may thus be coded in semantic and rhetorical structures and paired with opposed valuations: they are bad, we are good. Power also consists in specific access to such verbal interchanges: black people usually are excluded from such talk, and those concerned cannot talk back or correct possibly biased representations.

We see that in these ways power also affects the very core of what is said, *viz.*, the semantic content, or the story, that realizes the prejudiced situation models. Models and hence stories may be selected that represent minorities in a systematically negative way. This may also show, more subtly, in the choice of specific stylistic features and the recourse to the usual semantic moves of positive self-presentation ('I have nothing against them, but...')

In other words, White power in this case shows as White communicative power in intra-group conversation, as freedom to control the topics and their negative contents, and therefore as the freedom to persuade other ingroup members. With few constraints, *viz.*, those of the anti-discrimination norm, which

underlies the moves of positive self-presentation, white people may thus contribute to the reproduction of racism.

Obviously, informal communication also allows the expression of protest and resistance against the powerful. Blacks may scorn racist Whites among each other, and women may thus show solidarity against male oppression. It is important to realize the relevance of this complementarity of power in the form of resistance.

#### *Control of representation*

Power may also be expressed in discourse by mediation and representation. We may speak about the powerful, show or defend their power, and thus legitimate it. This is typically the case in many genres of media discourse, such as news reports, advertising, opinion articles, movies or other television programs. In this way, writers have models of the social situation in which powerful groups or individuals and their actions are represented as 'important' and hence worth writing about (van Dijk, 1987b). Topic choice in that case may be consistent with the positions of the powerful, e.g., the elite, and the same holds for the formal and deferential style of description and identification. Topics that express negative properties of the powerful may be (self-) censored, or be found to express opinions instead of 'facts', so that they fall outside the ideological boundaries of news.

The discursive representation of power has many dimensions. Despite its indirectness, it may be most pervasive. The powerful need not speak themselves, although they may be preferentially quoted. They have people who speak or write for them. They have bureaucratic or professional organizations, such as press agents or 'speakers', that formulate their wishes, plans, policies and decisions (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). More than any other discourse, this discourse is public, sometimes reaching millions, thereby persuasively confirming the power of the elite. Frequency of topical occurrence as news actors, prominence on the page or in the headlines, preferred topics that are consistent with their concerns, and formal and deferential style thus all contribute to the media representation and legitimation of the powerful.

*Access*

Finally, the enactment, expression or representation of power in discourse are not limited to the levels of discourse itself. Power may also show in the control of the very access to discourse. We have seen that the powerful may control whom they wish to speak to, whereas the powerless may be summoned to speak, e.g. to the doctor, the teacher, to the welfare officer, to the police officer, or to the judge. Similarly, the powerful control the range and the scope of their discourse genres. Beyond everyday conversation, they are the ones that control formal dialogue and written, public communication and discourse. They are the ones who engage in decisive government discussions, parliamentary debates, and board meetings, or who write (or have written) policy reports, laws, regulations, textbooks, and media messages. They are the ones who organize and control their preferential access to the media, either directly through declarations, or indirectly through representations in news stories. They are the ones who own newspapers, TV-stations, publishing houses, technology, and who control the business of mass communication. News values are ideologically shaped in such a way that elites and their actions have topical preference, and this also means that they are most prominent as news sources, thereby controlling both access and content.

Research about the role and representation of ethnic minorities consistently shows the complementarity of these power roles. Minorities have less organized access to the media. They are represented consistently in a negative, stereotypical way, mostly in terms of problems or conflict. They are hardly employed as reporters, let alone as editors, directors or managers (Hartmann and Husband, 1974; van Dijk, 1983, 1987c; Smitherman and van Dijk, 1987; Wilson and Gutiérrez, 1985). In this way, the media both reflect and prepare the exclusion and topical domination of minorities in White everyday talk. However, whereas everyday talk is local, the mass media reproduce White control institutionally and throughout society at large. Besides education, the mass media are probably the most pervasive form of the symbolic reproduction of White (and male, and Western, etc.) power, social cognition and discourse. Especially when alternative information is lacking for the public at large, as is the case about ethnic minorities and Third World peoples, the dominant discourse of the media — and of those who control the media — essentially controls the fundamental structures and sometimes even the contents of social representations. Here we touch upon the core of the

ideological process that defines the interactions between discourse, cognition and power.

### **Concluding remarks**

We see that the relations between social power and discourse are complex and that at all levels of production and structure discourse will show not only the powerful (or powerless) position of the speaker or the hearer, but also, by access and representation, the power structures of society. We have stressed, however, that this process is mediated by social cognitions, and the situation or communication models derived from them. The interpretation, recognition and legitimation of power is not an immediate property of power, but is ideologically mediated. The powerful elite need not 'force' itself upon the journalists in order to be represented as such in the media. Rather, the models of the journalists embody their attitudes and ideologies about social structures and are strategically organized in terms of professional 'news values'. Relevance and importance of topics or actors thus seems to be a 'natural' or 'inherent' property of news in general, not the consequence of a social value, that is, as a necessarily 'biased' opinion. In general, without social representations and without models we cannot produce or understand discourse, but the same holds more specifically for the exercise of power in or through discourse.

We suggested that this mediation of power by social cognitions does not only reproduce and legitimate power, it also allows personal variation, deviation, protest and resistance. Even with limited access, limited control, and marginal (or even negative) representation in the mass media, there are situations in which oppositional groups can recuperate some control of the public domain. The feminist and the civil rights movements are prominent examples. First through informal discussions in small groups, then through public demonstrations (slogans, coverage), then through limited printed communication (pamphlets, radical books and small newspapers), or through the organization of press conferences and sending out press releases, they may finally reach public attention in the mass media. The power of resistance, then, takes some of the properties of power in general. In the appropriate socio-economic and political context, the effectiveness of such power is also discursive. Hence, both in the exercise of power, and in the growth and enactment of resistance and counter-power, social control presupposes

cognitive control, which in turn requires communication, text and talk. This paper has tried to show some of the theoretical ways in which these multiple and mutual implications of discourse, cognition and power can be analyzed.

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