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Title: **Outside in-group and out-group identities?: Constructing male solidarity**

and female exclusion in UK builders' talk.

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Abstract:

This paper examines the spoken interactions of a group of British construction workers to discover whether it is possible to identify a distinctive 'builders' discourse'. Given that builders work for a mostly all-male profession (Curjao, 2006), we ask whether the ways in which male builders converse with each other while 'on the job' can be held in any way responsible for the under-representation of women within this major occupational sector in the UK.

This paper reports on a case study of the conversations of three white, working class, male builders, which took place while travelling in a truck between different building sites. This forms part of a larger ethnographic study of builders' discourse in different work locations. The analysis shows that male builders are highly collaborative in constructing narratives of in-group and out-group identities (Tajfel 1978, Duszak 2002). Various other male groups are demonised in these conversations: Polish immigrant builders, rude clients and rival builders. However, there is almost no reference to women. The paper concludes that women are viewed as so unthreatening to male ascendancy in the building industry that they do not even feature within the 'out-group'.

Key words: construction of identities, masculinities, solidarity, exclusion, in-groups/out-groups, collaborative talk.

Introduction

The primary purpose of this paper is to investigate the spoken interactions of a group of British construction workers (henceforth, 'builders'), and to ask whether there is anything distinctive or special about their linguistic identities, given that they work for a largely all-male profession. A secondary, related purpose is to ask whether such builders' discourse can be held in any way responsible for the profound lack of women within this major professional sector. To date, there is relatively little research conducted on the linguistic identities of semi-skilled, working class professions, particularly in traditionally all-male contexts (although see for example, Bernstein 1998; Stubbe 2000), so we hope that this paper will encourage further research and discussion in this sub-field.

This paper reports on an ethnographic study of informal conversations among a group of white British working class male builders, which took place in different locations including a variety of building sites, and a truck travelling between these sites. Wallace, who collected the data and is one of the participants, is a builder during his vacations. An ethnographic study, using a qualitative approach to discourse analysis, is unlikely to provide conclusive evidence to answer the second, sociologically challenging research question above (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). However, discourse analysis is routinely used in professional and workplace settings in order to elicit rich and detailed insights about identities and relationships (e.g. Baxter 2003, Ehrlich 2006, Holmes 2006, Mullany 2007; Richards 2006; Shaw 2006). On the basis of a micro-linguistic analysis of selected data, this paper argues that *one* reason why the construction industry continues to be inaccessible to women is that the spoken discourse of builders is constructed in hegemonic and excluding ways.

The UK construction industry is largely dominated by males, more so than any other classified industrial sector. In comparison to males, female employment within this sector covers just 10% of full-time work, a statistic that has barely changed over the last 15 years (Curjao, 2006). Consequently, it is rare to come across women working as construction workers on British building sites, although it is more commonplace to meet workers of different ethnicities, classes and educational backgrounds (ibid). Ironically, this is one of the few occupations where women are *more* likely to have jobs at supervisory or managerial levels than at manual and operational levels (Curjao, 2006). At the managerial level at least, women are moving gradually into the profession.

In this paper, we highlight a significant feature of the data, which is that these builders tend to construct their linguistic interactions in terms of in-group and out-group identities (Duszak 2002; Tajfel 1978, van Dijk 2001). We consider how this conceptualisation works to affirm the builders' sense of solidarity as members not just of a male profession, but more specifically as a largely white, British, working class, male profession. Their identities are constructed in contradistinction to a series of threatening and therefore demonised 'others': Polish immigrant workers, people of a 'higher' social status, 'cowboy' or untrustworthy rival builders, and difficult male customers. Our study shows that women are clearly missing from this list, either because they are entirely absent, or because they are quickly dismissed from these builders' conversations. This sense of linguistic exclusion suggests that females rarely figure on the occupational 'landscapes' of builders, whether as colleagues, bosses, employees, suppliers, competitors, or even as clients.

In order to meet the aims of this paper, we will conduct a micro-linguistic analysis of four extracts from the data which shows how the spoken interactions of these builders serve to polarise the representation of 'us' (in-groups) and 'them' (out-groups) according to an underlying strategy of 'positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation' (van Dijk

2001: 103). In doing so, these builders construct a strong sense of solidarity and cohesive identity as a means of self-validation against those who would 'do power' over them. This in-group solidarity reinforces a specific set of normative identities: as white, British, working class, male builders upholding perceived values of decency, honesty, legality and hard work. Such linguistic identities leave little semantic space (Schulz 1975/1990) for occupation by females wishing to enter or stay within the building profession. We briefly consider linguistic strategies available to females hoping for careers in the construction industry in light of our analysis.

Review of the literature

This paper draws upon multi-disciplinary strands of social theory in order to guide the research study and formulate the theoretical framework of its analysis. First, it refers to the post-structuralist, Judith Butler's (1990: 33) theory of 'performativity', famously encapsulated in the phrase 'gender is the repeated stylisation of the body'. This theory was later adapted by the feminist linguist, Deborah Cameron (1997: 49), who suggested that speech too is 'a repeated stylisation of the body' and on this basis, 'people are who they are because of...the way they talk'. The theory of performativity can be more broadly located within social constructionist and post-structuralist theories, which reject the idea that 'identity categories are fixed, unitary properties of the individual' (Weedon 1997), but rather are 'produced and sustained by individual agents in interaction with each other'. As Vivien Burr (1995: 4) has said in her discussion of social constructionism,

> It is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated.

Critical discourse analysts such as Norman Fairclough (1995, 2001) also view daily linguistic interactions as means by which dominant 'discourses' gradually become culturally

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entrenched as norms within given social or occupational contexts. Such dominant discourses become strongly associated with, and indexical of certain types of identities such as, in this case, white British working class, male builders, who develop certain patterns and structures of linguistic interaction which come to define them within their work contexts.

The study is also inspired by social identity theory originally developed by the social psychologist Henry Tajfel (1978: 61), who views identity as:

> .....part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [sic] membership of a group or groups together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.

Tajfel (1978) suggests that all individuals do 'identity work' as members of social groups, which involves three processes. S*ocial categorisation* concerns dividing people into categories that have either positive or negative associations. *Social comparison* involves assessing one's own group in terms of relative status and deprivation to other groups. Lastly, *psychological group distinctiveness* concerns the explicit or perhaps implicit ideology of the group in terms of what it seeks to preserve or to change about itself in relation to others. These definitions are important to this study because they inform the ways in which this group of participants make sense of their relationships with other social groups: 'cowboy' builders, patronising 'upper class' customers, immigrant workers and so on. Social identity theory helps to explain why these builders tend to construct their identities in terms of in-group and out-group dichotomies, always tending towards positive self-representation and negative other-representation. Indeed, we will seek to analyse manifestations of the three processes in the linguistic data sample below.

More recently, studies using the theoretical framework of in-group/out-group identities (variously conceptualised and described as 'boundary marking' or 'markedness') have been

conducted from cognitive, social and linguistic perspectives (e.g. Duszak 2002; Myers-Scotton 1993; Richards 2006). Furthermore, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has taken the conceptual framework of the in-group/out-group dichotomy and reapplied it to analyses of unequal power relations in institutional and media discourses. For example, in a critique of some Microsoft literature, Teun van Dijk (2001) shows how the in-group/out-group dichotomy is appropriated by a multinational company to demonise points of view which oppose their vested, capitalist interests. Similarly, our study bases part of its analysis on the in-group/out-group dichotomy as a key structuring device in representing social experiences, and is therefore relevant not only to an analysis of sub-cultural differences between social groups, but also to unequal sets of power relations.

Thirdly, in terms of research into masculine identities, the language and gender scholar, Jennifer Coates (1997: 108) has conducted seminal work on 'the way a conversational floor is constructed in an all-male conversation'. More recently, Coates (2003: 42) analysed a corpus of 32 all-male narratives produced in informal conversations. She concluded that these tended to reproduce 'dominant discourses of masculinity' both in terms of topics (cars, modern technology, drinking, travel, sex), but also in terms of narrative features. For example, male narratives were often stories of achievement, paid considerable attention to detail, used taboo language prolifically, lacked references to women, but further, 'construct[ed] women and gay men as the despised other' (Coates 2003: 69). Furthermore, interactive talk tended to be competitive rather than collaborative, although there were instances of the latter. According to Coates (2003: 65), male talk, unlike female talk, tends to be low on self-disclosure, and indeed, she suggests that the men in her study 'struggle to reconcile' alternative or competing discourses of masculinity where vulnerability might be displayed. While the spoken interactions in our data cannot be defined solely as narratives but rather comprise a broad range of linguistic functions such as discussion, argument, transactional talk and small talk,

we were nonetheless interested to see to what extent Coates' 'dominant discourses of masculinity' distinguished the language of our group of builders.

Recent work on post-structuralist identities (Baxter 2006, Cameron 2005), has questioned the all-embracing notion that males and females have different interactional styles. For example, Marra, Schnurr and Holmes (2006) have demonstrated in their study of business meetings, that female and male leaders switch with equal facility between interactional styles traditionally coded 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Such research has actually challenged the notion that individuals need to 'reconcile' competing gendered discourses (Coates 2003: 65), but rather individuals can enjoy a certain facility to take up different and competing subject positions. However, post-structuralist scholars have also acknowledged the undeniable power of dominant or hegemonic gendered discourses, which individuals may attempt to challenge and resist, but which are often too culturally entrenched (in terms of the Marxian notion of the 'praxis of the practico-inert') to be overturned. In this study, there is indeed evidence of hegemonic discourses of masculinity that shape and mediate the spoken interactions of the three builders.

Finally, this study builds on an expanding literature in the field of professional and workplace discourse (e.g. Koester 2006; Richards 2006; Sarangi and Roberts 1999). Within gender and language studies, scholars have explored the construction of gendered identities in a range of professional and public contexts such as courtrooms (Ehrlich 2006), the Houses of Parliament (Shaw 2006), doctors' surgeries (West, 1998), call centres (Cameron 2002; Franken and Wallace 2006), and business settings (Baxter 2008; Marra, Schnurr and Holmes 2006; Mullany 2007). These studies have largely focused on the construction of feminine professional identities and/or the interactions between males and females. This work has been immeasurably supplemented by a set of studies edited by Barrett and Davidson (2006), which investigates such workplace settings as management meetings, medical emergency control

rooms, international business, and employment interviewing. Focusing on the female rather than male experience, it has highlighted the issues of gender as a 'linguistic performance', institutionalised prejudices against women, and how workplace 'barriers' for women can be challenged. While some significant research has been conducted within manual or operational contexts such as shops, factories, workshops, farms as well as engineering and construction sites (e.g. Berman and Brown 1999; Bernstein 1998), there is relatively little in relation to gendered identities (although see Holmes and Stubbe 2003; Stubbe 2000), perhaps because of difficulties of researcher access and participation in environments where health and safety considerations are a particular issue. In our case, access and participation were made considerably easier by virtue of Wallace's gender and experience as a builder.

The Research Study

This ethnographic case study involved a variable group of white, British, male, skilled manual labourers aged between 21 and 45, three of whom feature in this analysis. The data were collected over the course of a week in two main locations, a truck driving between different building sites, and various building sites while the builders were 'on the job'. In all, Wallace gathered about 40 hours of spoken data, of which not all was usable because of problems of interference from background noise (hammering, drilling, radio, etc). Wallace was well integrated within this group as he regularly works with its members during his vacations. His role as a researcher was as a 'participant observer' according to Gold's (1958) typology of observer types, obtaining his best results through participating in a group conversation and then taking a step back to observe its natural progression.

For the purposes of this paper, we shall focus on data collected in the truck, which involved Wallace and two other builders, one of whom was driving. The data from this location were selected first for technical reasons (the quality of sound was far better in the truck compared

to the intrusive background noises of the work locations) and secondly for content reasons as the builders were using talk for a wide variety of purposes, not simply to accomplish transactional goals such as getting a job done. The data were recorded by means of a hand-held digital voice recorder, which was effective for its discreetness and mobility, and these data were subsequently transcribed according to Jefferson's (2004) conventions for Conversation Analysis, in order to convey verbal, prosodic and paralinguistic features.

In order to address our primary purpose of investigating the spoken discourse of builders as members of a largely all-male profession and asking what, if anything, makes it distinctive, we began by taking a *deductive* approach (applying pre-conceived categories to the data), drawing upon Coates' (2003; 69) definitions of 'dominant discourses of masculinity' in order to describe the patterns of linguistic identities we discovered. As a consequence, we did indeed find evidence in our data in terms of stories of achievement, excessive attention to detail, considerable use of taboo language, low levels of self-disclosure, lack of reference to females, though *not*, as our analysis shows below, a denial of femininity in terms of 'constructions of women (and gays) as the despised other' (Coates 2003: 69). However, because we discovered that there were patterns in our data that Coates' categories did *not* cover, we also used an *inductive* approach that allows other categories to arise more naturally (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). We acquired these new categories from innumerable readings of the data and noting the repeated use of certain linguistic and thematic features. As a result, three significant, additional patterns emerged which then became a key interest in the study: first, the semantic structuring device of the us/them dichotomy, with the further dimension of 'demonising the other'; secondly, the non-stereotypical feature of *collaborative* talk shaping these builders' interactions, and thirdly, the exclusion (rather than simply absence) of females from their talk.

In terms of our data analysis, we have drawn on van Dijk's (2001: 96) notion that CDA offers 'a critical perspective on doing scholarship....discourse analysis with attitude.' The definition of the sign 'critical' within CDA has varied considerably within the field, from post-Marxist interpretations (e.g. Fairclough 2001), to post-structuralist conceptualisations (Wodak 2008), although all CDA theorists have an interest in the deconstruction of unequal power relations. As such, van Dijk suggests that CDA 'can be conducted in, and combined with any approach and sub-discipline in the humanities and the social sciences'. While CDA may be an attitude rather than an approach, many of its exponents have indeed developed 'methods' that can be used to analyse spoken and written discourse (e.g. Fairclough 1995, van Dijk, 2001, Wodak 2008). In post-structuralist spirit (Baxter 2003, Wodak 2008) we have selected methods that we consider expedient or 'fit for purpose': methods that will allow us to deconstruct the patterns revealed inductively in the data: the in-group/out-group structuring device; the use of collaborative talk; and the exclusion of females. For the former, we borrowed methods from Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS), with its interest in a range of micro-linguistic features (Cameron 2001). IS micro-analyses grammatical and lexical use, as well as 'contextualisation cues' (Gumperz 1982) such as back-channelling, taboo language, tag questions, prosody and so on. IS analysis tends to lead to sociolinguistic generalisations about interactional styles and their connection with particular sub-cultures, but does not offer a critique on power relations as such. We have also borrowed methods from applied Conversation Analysis (CA) for its focus on 'locally managed' turn-taking in naturally occurring conversation, and more importantly for its recognition that co-constructed or simultaneous talk is fundamental to the construction of social identities (Coates 2003). In line with the conversation analyst, Schegloff's (1999) own recommendation, we chose to use CA as a useful tool for the analysis of turn-taking within a framework of social critique. While interested in making sociolinguistic observations about sub-cultural phenomena, we felt that CDA's over-arching

'discourse analysis with attitude' would offer more wide-reaching, critical interpretations of our data.

Below, we analyse various extracts from our data in order to reveal the distinctive linguistic patterns characterising builders' discourse, but also to reveal what makes it potentially hegemonic in the sense that it excludes references to women.

The analysis

The following analysis will be divided into four sections: the 'us/them' divide; demonising the other; collaborative talk; and excluding women.

(1) The 'us/them' divide

In Extract 1 (see Appendix), the builders move from discussing one social group – 'cowboy' or untrustworthy rival builders, to discussing another social group– difficult and 'snobbish' customers.

While it is fairly obvious on a first reading that the notion of an 'us/them' dichotomy is structuring this interaction, we shall now consider how this is signified linguistically. One distinctive way is *grammatically* through pronominal use. It becomes evident from an early point in the extract that the second person pronoun 'you' is used to indicate the speaker 'I' and by implication, 'us', as in this instance:

> 501G: (ha ha ha) (0.5) you could be (.) the best builder in the world (1.0) and (0.5)
>
> but (.) they-they won't portray you as that (0.5) they'll portray you as (.) that
>
> (.) you're gonna come round (.) look in their fuckin tool drawer [(.) an...]

The use of 'you' fulfils two functions here. It is used as an indefinite pronoun – in the sense of '*one* could be the best builder' – but also as a definite reference to G: himself and the

immediate audience. This has the effect of combining the speaker G's own opinion with those of his colleagues in the truck, as if to say 'I' and 'we' know and feel this together. Indeed, in the following lines:

> 504M: [they ca]n't trust you (.) you can't (.) they'll lock the house up 'cos you're builders=
>
> 505G: =the amount o times (.) you gone to do a job (.) an they won't give you a key

Again the combined function of 'you' as a universal reference to all builders, and its specific reference to 'the three of us in this truck' helps to form a joint or mutually shared understanding, and thus works to construct a strong sense of solidarity between the three builders.

Turning now to the use of the third person pronoun 'they' to denote 'them' or 'the other' in any of the lines quoted above, the use of 'they...their' refers anaphorically to an earlier reference to 'dodgy customers' (l.499). Here, the dichotomising of pronoun use invites the reader to perceive 'you' and 'they' as oppositional entities. This is achieved grammatically in two ways. Either the subject is 'us' and the object is 'them', or the first clause of an utterance may represent 'us' and the subsequent clause may represent 'them', as in the following example from Extract 2 (see Appendix) where the builders discuss the influx of Polish immigrant workers and compare life in Britain with life in Poland:

> 313M: <u>over here</u> if you had a bit of a ruck with a (.) with a bloke you can go outside an sort it out (.) <u>over there</u> ah (.) now days these Polish blokes (.) they got guns (my emphasis)

Here, the deictic adjuncts 'over here' and 'over there' quite literally serve to separate and contrast the first clause containing 'you', from the second clause containing the pronouns

'these' and 'they'. The effect of this use of grammar is to give an impression of a separate entity residing outside the established 'in-group' and consequently sets up the sense of an 'us and them' divide. Thus, pronominal use is seen to be an important means of achieving identity work (Tajfel 1978) for this group of builders, through social categorisation (dividing people up into positive and negative sub-groups), as well as social comparison (assessing one's own group in terms of relative status and deprivation). We note that references to customers in this extract generally appear to be non-gender-specific.

(2) Demonising the other

A further dimension in the way that builders construct their linguistic identities in relation to other social groups is by *demonising* 'the other'. According to van Dijk (2001), polarisation of in-groups and out-groups is routinely achieved by emphasising what is *good* about us while de-emphasising the bad, and conversely emphasising the *bad* in the other while de-emphasising the good. We will now consider a number of semantic and linguistic means to achieve the demonising of the other in order for the builders to feel a sense of superiority and solidarity against various specified enemies.

In Extract 2 (see Appendix), the three builders move from discussing the cost of hiring contract native British labour to the much cheaper cost of hiring Polish immigrant labour. Rather than viewing this as a benefit, they construct the issue as a threat to the British construction industry. As becomes apparent, these builders are drawing on dominant media discourses on the perceived threat of immigration to the jobs and lives of British workers. Clearly, it is not inevitable that the current arrival of Polish immigrant workers to Britain should be seen as 'a bad thing'. In terms of the building trade, scholars have argued that the trend has been good for the British economy, providing a plentiful source of cheap labour (e.g. Salt and Millar 2006). Yet these three builders have latched onto the reactionary 'moral

panic' pervading news discourses, that foreign labour should be perceived as a threat (e.g. Erjavec, 2003).

The first means of demonising the other is the use of *prejudicial typecasting*, in which the out-group is progressively represented as deviant and criminalised. Typecasting is obvious in the use of a nationality label to generalise about individual people ('load o' Polish'; 'these Polish blokes', 'these Romanians'), further reinforced by the use of the demonstrative pronoun 'these' and the derogatory adjective 'load o''.

In line 309, the process of demonising immigrants begins quite lightly when M. claims that 'these' workers act illegally because 'they're not going to pay their taxes'. From here, the process of demonization escalates more rapidly. M. assumes the role of the expert in his prejudicial characterisation of immigrants as murdering, job-stealing and untrustworthy:

> 315   they got guns an' knives an' they jus' (.) they don't think nothing of slitting
>   someone's throat

Here the speaker is presenting a series of unsubstantiated, highly emotive claims, which has the effect of typecasting whole nationalities as criminals.

From this point, these claims continue to escalate as M. again assumes the role of the expert:

> 321M: =and in the end (.) in the end (.) you're a minority in [your] own country=
>
> 322G: [yeah]   =well
>   we are now
>
> 323M: there's a bit in the paper today they reckon (.) by the year two th-by the year
>   two thousand. (1.0) [they
>
> 325G: [((cough))]

326M: reckons there there'll be (1.4) two thousand and twenty sorry (.) there'll be er

(.) twenty thousand immigrants in this country (0.7) no twenty million sorry (.)

immigrants

327G: s' the whole of London.

This interaction is interesting in three ways. *First,* it achieves the role of further demonizing the Polish and Romanians in a way that now directly affects the conceptual 'us'. The speaker is re-appropriating the word 'minority' – often used to apply to the very groups he is demonising – and reapplying it to 'us' in order to suggest that there is a reversal of fortune that will negatively affect the in-group.

Secondly, the interaction rapidly escalates the scale of the perceived threat from the demonised other. The use of a series of random, ever-expanding statistics actually mimics the supposed rapid increase of the immigrant population, and has the effect of reproducing the sense of 'moral panic' reported in the media (Erjavec, 2003). Thus, we have a good example of how newspaper discourse serves to stir up moral panic in its readers, even if it is possibly based on a faulty reading! *Thirdly*, the interaction has the effect of redefining the membership of 'you' and 'us' such that the whole of native England is now potentially under attack from the demonized element. This suggests that the boundaries of the membership of the in-group are not fixed and limited to just three men in their truck, but can be expanded to include other social groups and even the whole native British population, depending on the scale of the perceived threat from the demonised other. The 'psychological distinctiveness' (Tajfel, 1978) of this expanded group is defined in spuriously racial if not racist terms, but not, it would appear, in gendered terms. In terms of linguistic characterisation, these builders construct themselves as constantly under threat by different, and often alien, ethnic and social groups who would take away their livelihood, despite their best attempts to earn an honest living.

However, we again note in this extract, as in other extracts we analysed, that there is no explicit reference to women – either as members of the in-group or the out-group. While the analysis in this section throws up interesting insights about the ways in which racial and other types of prejudices are developed and construed (van Dijk 1991), the main purpose of this paper is to learn more about the construction of male builder identities, and to consider whether these have any implications for the lack of women in the building trade. We now consider another instance of how builder identities are constructed.

(3) Collaborative talk

One of the most distinctive features of our data is the use of what Coates (2003) and other language and gender theorists have termed 'co-operative' or collaborative talk', an apparently unusual feature in male discourse. Coates (2003: 59) claims that *competitive* talk aligns with hegemonic masculinity, and therefore collaborative talk is only likely to occur when:

> .....speakers know each other well and have shared knowledge. It is much less
> common in all-male talk than all-female talk, but can be a powerful means of
> expressing solidarity.

Echoing Cameron's (1997) work on the construction of heterosexual masculinities, a significant trend in *our* data is that the builders' interactions manifest many more features of collaborative than competitive talk, which in this case seem to reinforce a strong sense of in-group membership and solidarity, as a defence against the demonised other.

 One of the principal linguistic means by which these builders achieve collaborative talk is through co-construction (e.g. Cameron 1997). There are places throughout the interaction where all three speakers co-construct utterances such that they sound like one speaker rather than two or three:

296G: it's fuckin

297M: dear

298G: it's too dear (2.0) that's just what I said to him

M.'s utterance in l.297 is a collaborative completion of G.'s unfinished comment, and G. then repeats and takes up M.'s choice of the evaluative adjective, 'dear'. G.'s follow-on clause 'that's just what I said to him' confirms that M. has anticipated his thoughts correctly. Another example of this is a little later:

318R: you should see Reading there's fff- Polish there (.) they got churches

        up there (0.5)   [pubs]

319M: shops (.) ev[erythi]ng ain't they

320R: Polish bars=

321M: =and in the end (.) in the end (.) you're a minority in [your] own country=

In l.319, M. adds on to and embellishes R.'s description of the Polish immigrant take-over, which produces a moment of simultaneous talk. M. indicates that his interruption should not be seen as a violation of R.'s turn, by adding the tag question 'ain't they?' to indicate his co-operative intent. R. indeed continues his turn seamlessly, and M. once again adds onto R.'s utterance but produces a coda to R.'s comments (Labov 1972). The following co-constructed talk is punctuated by supportive back-channelling throughout ('yeah'; 'exactly'), as well as the use of tag questions:

307G: I don't know whether their work's any good (2.7) you don't know do you

308M: well no (.) plus (.) I'm not being funny I wouldn't employ one (0.5) because

309   (0.5) they can go home can't they you know you s-s say they're not gonna pay

       their taxes

310R: exactly

Both tag questions here work to elicit agreement and empathy between the three men. The first in line 307 is affirmed by M. immediately ('well no' actually serves as an agreement which is then supplemented by an affirming comment). The second instance of (embedded) tag question used by M. produces a delayed but nonetheless positive response from R: with the overall effect that all three men appear to be in perfect agreement with each other. In line 308, M. possibly uses the typically British idiom 'I'm not being funny' here to downplay the effect of a sensitive or non-politically correct comment ('I wouldn't employ one'), which might potentially alienate his colleagues.

To sum up this section, we found that the use of co-constructed, collaborative talk is a distinctive feature of these three builders' linguistic identities. It gives the sense here that the men are a tightly-knit team, used to interacting and working together, which endorses their 'psychological distinctiveness' as honest British working class men pitched against (in this example) an untrustworthy 'other'. Arguably, the solidarity produced by this collaborative talk could work as a hegemonic barrier to all alien others who might attempt to enter their world – Polish immigrant workers, snobbish customers, rival or cowboy builders, but do 'the alien others' also include women?

(4) Excluding females

As we have seen, women are largely absent from our data, but when they do appear, are they represented as the out-group, the demonised 'other'? Interestingly across the data, there are no real examples of what Coates (2003: 69) terms 'the denial of femininity', in that there are no occasions when the builders 'actively construct women and gay men as the despised other'. Indeed, there are virtually no references to females (or gay men) throughout the data. Effectively women are invisible. Whenever a female *is* mentioned, she is viewed in no way

as being an aggressor or part of the conceptual 'other'. It is as if females are regarded as so non-threatening that they need not even figure in the out-group.

As mentioned above, customers and clients almost always fall into the 'out-group' category of the despised other. It becomes clear that customers are generally conceptualised as male, as the unmarked norm (see Appendix, lines 501-4 as example), even though 'the social reality' must be that female householders must deal with builders quite routinely. However, there are a couple of significant exceptions to the all-male rule, as in this example from Extract 3:

11M: (0.8) I did this job for this woman who-her mum an dad were like (.) lord an lady an this that an the other (.) she was lovely (.) <u>but</u> her old man was vile (.) he was about six foot two and he-he was q-quite a high (.) ranking (.) merchant banker an he'd been out in Oman (.) Dubai (.) workin for this big like (.) (price waterhouse) or summink like that (.) you know what I mean? (.) (*Continues talking about the male customer for another 30 lines*: my italics)

We can see that the female customer referred to here doesn't remain within the field of reference very long. While the female is described sympathetically, M.'s utterance almost immediately dismisses her presence from the equation by placing her *before* the contrastive conjunction 'but', which then enables the speaker to continue describing his interaction with the male in lengthy detail. Another example of where a woman is referred to and then quickly dismissed from the conversation occurs in Extract 4 (see Appendix), when M. is complaining about the treatment of builders by patronising (male) clients:

123M: you go (.) I'm not gonna talk to you whatever her name is (.) I want your <u>hus</u>band to talk to me (1.0) an then if he says anything say look (0.5) I dunno

who you think you re (.) you're in the fire service (.) ain't got a fuckin fireman

helmet on (.) I'm a civvy (.) right (.) an you might be able to get away with

talkin to people (.) an acting like you do with people around you (.) because

they've gotta (.) stomach you (.) I don't have to stomach you

In both examples, females are not seen as the source of threat to the 'in-group'. Where

females are paired with males as 'the client', the males are characterised as substantive and

the females as less substantive. Certainly the representation of the male client in the first

example above emphasises his prestigious and therefore intimidating qualities: he is

physically tall, high ranking, and works for a well-known, multi-national company. In this

way, the male is also foregrounded as the subject of conversation, whereas the female is

peripheralised and quickly excluded from the field of reference. Note that the direct use of

'you' to denote the female client is quickly replaced by the third person 'her', as she is

dismissed by M.'s narrative. Consequently, a key pattern is that these data 'portray a world

peopled by male human beings' (Coates 2003:44).

It is evident that females are not simply absent but are actually being *excluded* from the 'in-

group/out-group dichotomy' by means of a kind of linguistic dismissal. Being a member of

an out-group at least confers recognition and status as a categorisation worth attacking. We

suggest that women are viewed as so unthreatening to male experiences in the building trade

that they do not even qualify for a place in the 'out-group'.

Concluding thoughts

In terms of our primary aim above, this small-scale analysis reveals that while the linguistic

identities of builders are in many ways constituted by Coates' (2003: 65) 'dominant

discourses of masculinity', they are also constituted by social group solidarity (Tajfel 1978)

as a protection against a range of perceived threats. The in-group/out-group dichotomy serves

as a means of positioning these builders in contradistinction to other social groups whose 'otherness' might endanger their occupational identities and livelihood. Critical discourse analysts (e.g. van Dijk, 2001; Koller, 2004) have shown how this structuring device may be deployed by powerful groups or interests to create prejudices and social divisions against less powerful groups. In our study, the builders are variously positioned as relatively powerless in relation to mean, snobbish or difficult clients, for example, but relatively powerful in relation to the 'under-class' of Polish immigrant workers. We suggest that the in-group/out-group dichotomy can therefore be viewed as a flexible, discursive practice by which power relations can be manipulated, both as an instrument of 'doing power' over others, and also as a form of resistance and identity marking against more powerful social groups.

In terms of our secondary aim, the data reveals that females tend not to figure in builders' discourse - whether as bosses, clients, colleagues, workers or suppliers - despite the fact that women now perform all of these roles (Curjao, 2006). This kind of female absence continues to be a challenge to the field of gender and language studies in general: how can you study a phenomenon when it is lacking? In the spirit of Dale Spender (1980/1990), the construction industry can be viewed as a largely masculinised world where women as outsiders occupy 'a negative semantic space'. We suggest that the absence of a female-inclusive discourse offers a potential reason why the building profession continues to be inaccessible to women, particularly at manual and operational level. In discursive terms, female builders would have no place in the symbolic order if they wished to take part in a typical truck conversation, except perhaps as a force for resisting the status quo. Ironically, in post-structuralist terms (Baxter 2003, Wodak 2008), an outsider status might be construed as a positive thing, because it contests the duality of normative cultural practices. However, if matters were to change and women were to enter the profession at manual level in greater numbers, then arguably they would begin to feature in the out-group as a potential threat, just as Polish

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workers in Britain have recently done. Thus, being a member of the 'out-group' should not always be perceived as a negative construct, as being the disempowered or victimised other. It might also be construed as an index of emerging recognition, status and authority. But the choices for women wishing to enter this profession are stark: they can *opt out,* by choosing to remain outside this white, British male working profession as they currently do, except at more senior levels; they can join but *assimilate* via the unpromising route of the out-group as Polish workers are currently doing in Britain, or they can *resist*, by exposing the discriminatory linguistic and cultural practices that sustain such all-male professions, and propose alternative ways of engagement. This potentially, is the hardest challenge of all.

Appendix

Extract 1

498M: oh yeah there's (.) I'll tell you one thing (.) K. (.) you can (xxxx) for every dodgy-do you know you

499   see cowboy builders don't you on the TV (.) for every dodgy builder (.) we could show you fifty dodgy

500   customers

501G: (ha ha ha) (0.5) you could be (.) the best builder in the world (1.0) and (0.5) but (.) they-they won't

502   portray you as that (0.5) they'll portray you as (.) that (.) you're gonna come round (.) look in their

503   fuckin tool drawer [(.) an...]

504M: [they ca]n't trust you (.) you can't (.) they'll lock the house up cos you're builders=

505G: =the amount o times (.) you gone to do a job (.) an they won't give you a key

506M: this is the best one I had we were talkin about a-I say this to most customers (.) actually as well (.)

507   just to let em know (1.5) when I start a job I never have any money up front

508R: yeah

509M: so I'm doin a job at the moment (.) an it's like (.) you know (.) eighty grand: job (0.5) and (.) I will

510   turn up (.) first week (1.0) and (.) I'll have (.) machine driver there (.) machine diggin all that (.) I'll

511   have ready mix: concrete there (.) muckaway lorries: (.) labour there (.) materials there (0.5) first week

512   I'm there (.) I've done four thousand pounds (0.5) maybe five thousand pounds (.) right (0.8) now (.5)

513   what right have they got to say (.) I don't know if I trust the builder

514R: zactly

515M: I should be trustin the-I'm trusting them n-they're not trustin me

516R: zactly (.) it's your money tied up straight...

517M: you're trustin the customer (.) cos he's got money on you (2.5) hardly any of em (.) probably none (.)

518   ever pay you right up front (.) an say (.) here you are I'm in front of you (.) so you're always trustin

519   them

520R: yeah

521G: an that last payment you try to get out of em (0.5) they think it's all yours

522M: yeah

Extract 2

304M: yeah (2.4) trouble is you got (.) you got (.) you got (.) a load o- (.) polish coming into the country now

305   that (.) don't want those sort of expen[ses]

306G: ↑↑[yea]h but their↑↑ (.) whether their (.) their (.) I don't know

307   whether their works any good (2.7) you don't know do you

308M: well no (.) plus (.) I'm not being funny I wouldn't employ one (0.5) because (0.5) they can go home

309   can't they (2.0) you know you s-s say their gonna pay their taxes

310K: exactly

311M: wha-wha (.) why would you wa- (.) I'm not bein funny when you loo- (.) especially these

       Romanians an all these sorts (0.5) life's cheap out there (.) you know (.) over here if you had a

       bit of a ruck with a (.) with a bloke you can go outside an sort it out over there ah (.) now days

       these Polish blokes (.) they got guns an knives an they jus (.) they don't think nothing of slittin

       someone's throat

316R: ((cough))

317M: why would you want people like that? around ya

318R: you should see Reading there's fff- Polish there (.) they got churches up there (0.5) [pubs]

319M: shops (.) ev[erythi]ng ain't they

320R: Polish bars=

321M: =and in the end (.) in the end (.) your a minority in [your]own country=

322G: [yeah]   =well we are now

323M: there's a bit in the paper [today] they reckon (.) by the year two th-by the year two thousand.   (1.0)

         [they

324G: [((cough))]

325M: reckons there there'll be (1.4) two thousand and twenty sorry (.) there'll be er (.) twenty

         thousand immigrants in this country (0.7) no twenty million sorry (.) immigrants

327G: s' the whole of London.

328M: well it's a third of the population

329R: London is anyway now innit

Extract 3

11M: I did this job for this woman who-her mum an dad were like

12   (.) lord an lady an this that an the other (.) she was lovely (.) but her old man was vile (.) he

13   was about six foot two and he-he was q-quite a high (.) ranking (.) merchant banker an he'd

14   been out in Oman (.) Dubai (.) workin for this big like (.) (price waterhouse) or summink like that (.)

15   you know what I mean? (.) an he'd had-o-obviously had all these fuckin black blokes runnin around

16   after him an he was like (.) °an they were doin it all° (.) he's come back over here into fuckin

17   normal land

18R: yeah

19M: an all of a sudden he starts talkin to a couple of these labourers who I got workin for me like they're bitsv

20   of dirt (.) an he's-he's give one of it like that (0.4) poked him like that in his chest (0.8) you will do as I

21   tell you (.)

22   ↓↓this (name)↓↓ (.) he's looked at him (.) he went (0.5) you do that again mate (.) he said you see that

23   shovel   (0.5) he said (.) I'm gonna (.) take your head off with it (0.5) he went wha-wha-wha-wha what

24   did you say? (.) he goes (.) you do that again he said an I'll bury you (1.0) you can't reh-reh-reh-reh (.)

25   get off my site (.) get off my house off my property blah blah blah blah blah (.) he's come lookin

26   for me then (0.5) you know this (names) workin for me (.) wowa before you go any further

27   (.) I said (.) before you go any further (.) before you start shoutin (.) I heard exactly what went on (.) an I

28   said I w-that's your property (.) cos he's on your land (.) an he's on your-he's on-he's in your house an if

29   you don't want him here he's not here (.) I said but: (0.5) you know (.) I said you-I dunno where you've

30   come from (.) but you might be able to talk to people like that (0.5) you know (.) an I said it's not

31   what you said (.) it's the way you say it (.) I said you don't do: that I said you're over here now (.) an

32   you're a no-you're a nobody to that bloke (0.5) ↑↑an if you'd of done

33   [it in a p]ub↑↑someone

34R: [exactly]

Extract 4

123M: you go (.) I'm not gonna talk to you whatever her name is (.) I want your husband to talk to me (1.0) an

124   then if he says anything say look (0.5) I dunno who you think you are (.) you're in the fire service (.) I

125   ain't got a fuckin fireman helmet on (.) I'm a civvy (.) right (.) an you might be able to get away with

126   talkin to people (.) an acting like you do with people around you (.) because they've gotta (.) stomach

127   you (.) I don't have to stomach you

128G: well he jus don't wanna talk to me now

129M: well cos he's f -what sort of fuckin man's that then

130R: exactly that's bollocks like=

131M: = what sort of blokes that?

132G: [well that's-he's-] he's (.) what the problem-I had him: (.) an then I had (.) that wanker over at Fareham

133R: [if he's got a problem with you (.) he should talk to you]

Transcription key:

(.)	Micropause
(.5)	Pause in tenths of a second
[ ]	Start/finish of overlapping speech
=	Latching
_	Emphasis
((Laughs))	Non-verbal behaviour
[comment]	Editorial comment
?	Rising or questioning intonation
[xxx]	Indecipherable
(.hhh)	Audible intake of breath
(ha)	Syllable of laughter
::	Drawing out of the word/syllable
↑↑	Notably higher shift in pitch from the surrounding talk
↓↓	Notably lower shift in pitch from the surrounding talk
°	Quieter than surrounding talk

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