Membership Categorisation Analysis: Developing Awareness of Categories and their Consequences

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Andrea Whittle

& Frank Mueller

Introduction

Categorisation is a fundamental social practice common to all human societies. Think of how different societies around the world categorise animals. They might be categorised into: those which can be eaten and those which should not be eaten; those which belong to the domestic realm and those that can be kept as pets; those which belong to nature and those which should remain in the wild; those which can be made to work for human benefit and those which are pests and should be contained or destroyed.

Categories matter for how we understand people in society because it is through social categories that we think of people not only as unique individuals but as members of social groups. The process of human categorisation has been extensively studied across the social science disciplines, most notably in sociology, social psychology, cognitive linguistics and anthropology. The study of the classification of people often takes place under the label of 'identity' research (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006) and theories from social psychology such as Social Identity Theory have been especially influential in guiding the study of the cognitive processes presumed to underlie categorisation. The focus of this chapter will be different. Rather than working with assumptions about what goes on in people's minds, this chapter will outline a way of approaching the study of categorisation as a *visible and publicly accountable language practice*, an approach grounded in the work of American sociologist Harvey Sacks. We will propose

that this approach has value for students and practitioners of language because no other approach comes as close to the study of how categories are actually used in talk and text in real life situations, with real consequences for those involved.

Any number of social categories could be used to describe a person: for instance, as a 'father', a 'manager', a 'fascist', an 'immigrant', and so on. A 'membership category', then, is simply the "classification or social types that may be used to describe persons." (Hester & Eglin, 1997: 3) The categories we (more or less consciously and more or less explicitly) use to describe a person matter because they bring with them a set of social expectations, obligations, rights and responsibilities that are consequential for how people are judged and evaluated. In Jayyusi's (1984: 166) words, categories have a 'normative and moral infrastructure', as will be elaborated below. Categorisation is therefore a "normative practice through which inferences and implications are generated and managed" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006: 66). Importantly, these categories and their associated 'normative orders' are not simply stored in people's heads, they are also used as part of the accomplishment of practical tasks in different social settings. It is therefore important to note that categories do not just *describe* people, they are also used to *do* things as part of social interactions: such as criticising, complaining, praising, encouraging, inviting, commending, blaming, and so on.

For those who study or who use language in professional contexts, it is important that they are aware of what the categories used in talk and text *do* in society, in institutions and in organisations. Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) is an approach to studying language use that involves the analysis of the social categories that people use in talk and text to describe themselves and others. In this chapter we argue that MCA offers a promising approach for studying how realities are produced through the use of categories in talk and text, making it ripe for equipping language professionals with awareness of how the categories they study, produce and teach about are consequential for social relations, including relations of power. MCA is rooted in ethnomethodology, a branch of sociological analysis that is not normally linked to theories of power and ideology. However, some contest this assumption and, like us, propose that power relations can and should be analysed through the study of talk and text in interaction (see e.g. Watson & Goulet, 1998; Thornborrow, 2014).

In this chapter, our aim is to illustrate the role that categories play in specific communication contexts. We will demonstrate this in a political context through analysis of a political speech

made by Theresa May, who was the British Prime Minister between 2016 and 2019. The chapter is structured as follows. First, we provide an overview of the origins of MCA as it developed from an approach known as conversation analysis. Next, we outline how MCA approaches data analysis using talk and text-based materials. We then move on to provide an empirical illustration of MCA analysis by examining a political speech by Theresa May. We conclude the chapter by outlining the analytic value of studying categories in language use using MCA, focusing in particular on how MCA enables students and teachers of language use to develop awareness of the 'dual power' of language: its enabling and emancipating capacity for enacting progressive social change and its constraining and dominating capacity as a force for oppression and division in society.

Origins of Membership Categorisation Analysis

Both Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) emerged from the work of the American sociologist Harvey Sacks and the posthumous publication of his influential *Lectures on Conversation*, containing a series of lectures he gave from 1964 to 1972 that were first published together in 1992. The first approach, CA, analyses how people use their knowledge of the social world to interact with each other, focusing on turn-taking in sequences of interaction comprised of turns at talk and other embodied practices, such as gestures or facial expressions. The second approach, MCA, which is the focus of this chapter, involves the analysis of the social categories that people use to describe themselves and others in talk-in-interaction or in written texts. MCA has been described by Stokoe (2012: 278) as the 'milk float' (a metaphor of a slow-moving electric vehicle used for delivering milk) running behind the 'juggernaut' of CA, capturing the different pace at which CA and MCA have taken off in the social sciences, including in linguistics. While CA focuses on the sequential organisation of talk in interaction, MCA focuses on the ways in which categories are used in talk or text to enable members of a social group to accomplish whatever practical task they are engaged in: such as holding a business meeting, calling a helpline, teaching a class or writing a suicide note. The key question for an MCA analysis is: how are social categories used to engage in "practical reasoning" (Watson, 2015: 38) about the social world?

To understand this distinct tradition of research, it is worth spending some time outlining the foundations of CA and MCA in the ethnomethodological tradition it emerged from. While both

CA and MCA are influential in the field of linguistics, their intellectual origins actually lie in sociology. Ethnomethodology emerged from the work of American sociologist Harold Garfinkel. Sacks readily acknowledged the influence that Garfinkel's work had on him (Sacks, 1972: 32). Some scholars use the term EM/CA to reference this close link (Llewellyn & Hindmarsh, 2013). Ethnomethodology asks the same question as other sociological theories (e.g. Parsons, 1937) - 'how is social order achieved?' – but answers it in a different way. It does not start with the assumption that social facts, such as norms, values and identities, exist 'out there' as forces of normative constraint that create social order. Ethnomethodology rejects the idea that members of a society or social group are "cultural and judgemental dopes" (Watson, 2015: 26), being pushed and pulled into compliance by external constraints such as social norms, values or identities. Ethnomethodology instead studies *how* (i.e. through what "ethno-methods" or "members' methods") members of a society use their common-sense knowledge of the social world to accomplish social organisation 'from within'. The members of society *are* the sociologists: they are 'folk' sociologists (Wieder, 1974 [2015]) or 'practical' sociologists (Benson & Hughes, 1983). Social facts (such as an identity category) are seen as accomplishments, not pre-existing 'things' (Berger & Luckman, 1967/1991). Garfinkel (1967: 79) referred to this approach as the study of "fact production in flight".

While MCA retains its interest in categories used in spoken interaction, it is not confined to studying talk and has also been used to study written texts (see for example Eglin & Hester, 2003). Sacks (1992) uses two lines from a story written by a child in his now-classic analysis of "The baby cried. The mommy picked it up". Sacks asked a deceptively simple question: 'why do we hear the 'mommy' as the mother of this 'baby'? Why do we hear the baby's cries as the 'reason' why the mommy picks it up?' (Silverman, 1998: 78). The fact that we can understand the story without observing the actual scene being described seemed to be some kind of 'magic' (Sacks, 1972/1992: 236). The 'magic' lies in the fact that we readily infer that the 'baby' is the baby of the 'mommy' and both are related in the device 'family'. *Membership categorisation devices*, then, are collections of categories that 'go together' with some normative expectations about their relationships. We know that the 'baby' does not refer to a term of endearment for a loved one (e.g. "I love you, baby" – from the device 'terms of endearment') or an insult (e.g. "Stop acting like a baby" – from the device 'stage of life') because of the use of two categories from the 'family device'. Our common-sense knowledge of the family device helps us to infer not only that categories are related but also how they are *normatively* related: when babies cry, their mommies *should* pick them up (and can be judged accordingly when

they do not). In other words, mothers are commonly understood to have a category-bound moral obligation to pick up their crying infants.

The concept of *category predicates* is an important one in MCA and is especially relevant for the development of language awareness. Sacks first used the term 'category bound activities' to refer to the activities typically associated with a particular category of person (such as 'crying' for a baby or 'comforting' for a mother). However, this term has since been expanded to the concept of 'category predicates' to refer to the array of social characteristics conventionally associated with a category (Hester, 1992: 165). When someone uses a category, they invoke a set of assumptions about the "motives, rights, entitlements, obligations, knowledge, attributes and competencies" (Psathas, 1999: 144) of that person. For instance, Stetson (1999) analysed Japanese newspaper coverage of an incident involving a death at a railway station and found that different categories used to describe the man and woman involved in the incident – for example 'woman' or 'exotic dancer' and 'teacher' or 'drunk' – were consequential for how blame was implied in the story. Moral reasoning was normatively 'tied' to the different categories used in different versions of the story. For example, a 'teacher' is typically viewed as a morally upstanding member of society whereas a 'drunk' is typically not, with implications for how blame might be attributed to the person. This example shows how categorical reasoning takes place in texts as well as talk-in-interaction and the use of MCA to analyse texts has continued to this day.

Doing MCA: Methodological Approach

MCA offers a systematic method to expose and understand the implications of categorical reasoning. To do such an analysis, one might start with a collection of transcripts of talk-in-interaction or a collection of written texts and the first step involves identifying the categories people use in talk and texts, by whom and at which moment in their interactions. MCA can also be conducted on a single conversation or a single speech or text where that instance provides some insights into the social practices being accomplished (see for example Eglin and Hester, 1999). The analysis focuses on the categories *employed by the members of the social group themselves*, not those attributed to the members by the analyst (Watson, 2015: 26). For example, it does not matter whether the analyst knows that the woman being analysed is also a 'mother', what matters is how those members of society being studied use these categories (for

example, "As a mother, …", "Where is the child's mother?"). Importantly, the analyst also does not assume *a priori* that the categories used by one person are automatically accepted by another. MCA involves studying how membership of a category is "ascribed (and rejected), avowed (and disavowed), displayed (and ignored)" (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p.2) in particular settings and at particular times in the course of accomplishing some practical task.

Once the categories and their sequential location have been identified in the text, the analyst moves on to identify the kinds of *reasoning* and *inference* the categories enable the speaker or writer to accomplish. For example, Sacks' analysed calls to a suicide prevention centre and found that the categories of people who the caller has a *right* to expect support from are invoked as absent in their descriptions of having 'no one to turn to' (Silverman, 1998: 76). Callers describe how they have reviewed various categories of people, such as friends, family and spouses, and therefore reason that they have nobody to turn to in order to discuss their suicidal feelings.

An important aspect of the analysis involves identifying what kinds of *social actions* the categories are deployed to accomplish. In discursive psychology, Edwards (1991; 1997) points out that when people use categories they do so in the course of performing particular *actions*. These actions could be, for example, acts of complaining, praising, inviting, rejecting, blaming, excusing, justifying, admonishing, and so on. Categories are therefore part of *doing* something, not just *describing* something. They attend to some kind of "discursive business" (Edwards, 1997: 17). Understanding this discursive business requires the analyst to investigate not only which categories get used by whom and when, but also asking "what is this categorisation doing?" (Watson, 2015: 29). For example, Stokoe and Attenborough (2015: 57) give an example of the use of the category "tart" to describe a woman during a complaint about the conduct of a neighbour. Categories have been shown to come into play at particular points in the building of a complaint and also during the display of empathy or disagreement following a complaint.

To sum up, we can now list a set of research questions that sensitize language scholars and practitioners to the role categories play in the talk and texts they are teaching about in classrooms, creating in their own practice (as practitioners in the field of journalism, public relations, communications, etc.) or studying in their research:

- Which categories are being used in the talk or text?

- Who is using the various categories? Do the various people involved use similar or different categories in their accounts?

- Which social actions are categories used to accomplish?

- At what point in the interaction are categories used?

- What is the interactional or inferential 'upshot' or consequence of using these categories at these moments in the interaction?

- What implications do these categories imply for organizations and society?

For interested readers, Stokoe (2012) provides a useful 'how to' guide which provides guidance on the steps to work through in producing an analysis using MCA.

MCA: A 'Critical' Approach to Language?

As we noted above, MCA is not as typically associated with critical approaches as compared to other approaches such as Critical Discourse Analysis. Baker (2000) pointed out that EM/CA approaches can indeed have a 'critical edge' (p. 99) by revealing how categories work 'in situ' to "arrange relations of power, privilege and advantage" (p. 113). The value of MCA for the *critical* study of language, and the development of more critically-aware and ideologically-responsible language practitioners, is perhaps best illustrated by Eglin and Hester's work on the 1989 Montreal Massacre. Eglin and Hester (1999) used MCA to analyse the suicide letter written by the gunman, who killed 14 female engineering students. Eglin and Hester (2003) also used MCA in their analysis of the categories used in the press coverage, showing how categories played a key role in how newspapers made sense of the motive behind the attack. Here we will focus on one small example of the analysis by Eglin and Hester (1999) of the announcement made by the killer moments before he started shooting. Witnesses had reported that Marc Lepine entered l'Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal and entered a classroom, separated the male and female students, instructed the men to leave, then opened fire, killing six women. Before opening fire, Lepine is reported to have announced:

> "You're women. You're going to be engineers. You're all a bunch of feminists. I hate feminists."

What form of categorical reasoning was being used here? Lepine was reported to have said that his act was intended as a "fight against feminism" (Eglin & Hester, 1999: 255). The act of separating the men from the women certainly rendered visible his desire to kill *women*, but not necessarily his fight against *feminism* per se. What made these women representative of the social category 'feminists'? It is here that forms of *categorical reasoning* come into play. Levine's reasoning was grounded in his knowledge of gender equality campaigns aimed at securing female entry into traditionally male-dominated industries such as engineering. As women on an engineering degree, these women represented the 'feminists' he loathed and sought to destroy and would serve as a message to the wider feminist movement, including his political action targeted at what he categorised as a pro-feminist State.

> "By naming his intended victims as feminists, Lepine 'anonymises' them; he speaks to them not as individual persons, with names, biographies, families, plans and projects of their own; rather, he speaks categorially to them as representatives of feminism; he depersonalizes his victims and in so doing he politicizes them. His action, whilst concrete, is then also abstract since he kills not unique individual human beings but exemplars of categories in a political membership categorization device which comprises two membership categories: feminist 'revolutionaries' and anti-feminist 'counter-revolutionaries'." (Eglin & Hester, 1999: 259)

Levine sought to categorise his act of killing as an act in service of a political cause. This was not to be interpreted as an act of revenge founded on a personal grudge. Nor did he want it, contrary to what the papers reported (and as Levine himself anticipated would be reported), to be seen as an outcome of a mental illness and the act of a 'madman'. Rather, Levine wanted the killing to be understood as a political act of a counter-revolutionary fighter. The ideological dimension of categorisation is here visible and shows that categorisation is far from neutral or innocuous when used as part of an ideological campaign.

In our view, power relations and ideology *can* be brought into the analysis using MCA, just not in the way that it is typically brought into the analysis in other approaches. Ideology is brought into the analysis not as an analyst's device to explain *why* the talk or text was produced by identifying which social groups it serves to benefit, as one typically finds in Critical Discourse Analysis (see e.g. Fairclough, 2010). Rather, ideology enters the analysis as part of the practical reasoning of the members themselves, as they seek to make sense of which social

groups they belong to and whether particular events or actions serve to advance or threaten the interests they associate with those groups (see also Baker, 2000). For example, Stokoe (2010) shows how reasoning about the 'gender order' are used by suspects in police interrogations when they make claims such as "I'm not gonna hit a lady" and categorise themselves as "the type of man who does not hit women". Gardner (2012) also shows how ideologies of gender and nationality are brought into the clustering of categories relating men, barbeques, beer and nationality.

Following the ethnomethodological approach, the so-called 'topic/resource shift' allows the reservoir of everyday knowledge and reasoning, including reasoning about power, politics and ideology, to be opened up to research (Arminen, 2012). Interests, ideologies and political agendas can be approached as a topic of analysis in their own right by studying how they are brought into play during practical reasoning about the social world, not treated as a resource used by the analyst to explain what he or she has observed. For example, Levine made sense of himself as part of the category 'men' and made sense of various equality campaigns as threatening the interests, status and privileges of the group he categorised himself as belonging to. Interests therefore come into the analysis not as an explanatory variable but rather as part of the analytic task of studying how they are constructed and used in interaction (Potter, 1996; see also Whittle & Mueller, 2011). Interests are one of the many 'category predicates' that are associated with categories and used by members to engage in practical reasoning about society.

In the Montreal Massacre case, categorisation of the women targeted as 'feminists' played a key part in the gunman's reasoning about the 'problems' of gender relations in society, as he sought to reinstate patriarchal structures that served the interests of men and bring an end to the feminist movement that had sought to advance the interests of women. This example shows how an act of political violence was rendered 'sensible' to the gunman through categorisation practices, albeit with category-bound reasoning that the reader (like the authors of this chapter) might not share or endorse. While this example from the Montreal Massacre concerns the social category of gender, other categories could also be studied this way: class, race, ethnicity, age, and so on.

Studying 'common sense' in language use

Most of the time, unlike the case of the Montreal gunman, the reasoning and inference we undertake using categories are unproblematic and straightforward and shared in common with

others. We share the same 'common sense' understandings of the categories of people we interact with and those categorisations serve us perfectly well. We see a woman picking up a crying baby and assume the woman is the mother of the child and think nothing more of it. However, the categories we use can sometimes be misleading or even dangerous. Silverman (1998: 88) gives the example of the many shoppers who ignored two young boys leading the toddler Jamie Bulger out of a shopping centre, mistakenly assuming that they were witnessing a younger brother with his two older siblings. Cornelissen, Mantere and Vaara (2014) analyse the catastrophic mis-categorisation of Jean Charles de Menezes as a terrorist which led to his death at the hands of the counter-terrorism police who were pursuing him. Categories can also be used to dominate, oppress and terrorise others, as the example of the Montreal massacre discussed above showed. In this case, Marc Levine did *not* share the same categorical reasoning as other people he encountered. One teacher at l'Ecole Polytechnique, who tried unsuccessfully to reason with Levine to put away his gun, is reported to have told him that he had not rounded up 'feminists' but 'engineering students' (Eglin & Hester, 1999).

Thus, when using the term 'common-sense knowledge' and 'common-sense reasoning', this does not infer that *all* users of those categories necessarily share these in common. Categorical knowledge should not be understood as a pre-existing, decontextualised and reified entity like a 'schema' or 'machinery' shared by a social group, as might be found in some theories in cognitive anthropology, social psychology or linguistics (Baker, 2000: 101). To say that some kind of social or cultural knowledge has been drawn on with the use of a category does not mean that all members of the society or culture necessarily share that knowledge. Nor in fact do the parties to the interaction necessarily have to share the same categorical knowledge. Watson (1978) gives an example of a caller to a suicide prevention line who deploys a set of predicates regarding the obligations and expectations of a 'vicar' that is *not* shared by the call taker, resulting in a contest over the right to allocate blame. The extent to which categorical knowledge and reasoning is shared in common and remains stable over time is therefore an *empirical question* that can only be answered by studying real-life data.

Theresa May's first statement as Prime Minister

Before we begin to analyse our illustrative extract, it is worthwhile reflecting on the literature that has established the symbolic analysis of politics as a distinct sub-field in social theory.

One central strand goes back to Edelman's (1964) seminal attempt to analyse politics as symbolic action and account for the audience's "attachment to reassuring abstract symbols" (p.76), especially the audience's inclination to "respond chiefly to symbols that oversimplify and distort." (p.31) Promises made by the government might be less meaningful in terms of the specifics and more significant in terms of their abstract or symbolic capacity to "ward off evils and threats" (Edelman, 1977: 4). Indeed, by taking this a step further, one might follow the advice and pay more attention to the "dramaturgical side of political processes." (Hajer, 2009: 72) A heightened gulf between frontstage politics and backstage politics can lead to "disenchantment with politics" (Wodak, 2009: 19), or more seriously, might be connected with a more "general loss of authority and legitimacy …" (Hajer, 2009: 184). In contrast, when political, theatrical "dramas are successful … [actors'] performances are experienced as convincing, as authentic" (Alexander, 2006: 95). In the analysis that follows, we will seek to show how Theresa May sought to create a symbolic message of equality and fairness through the use of categories in her first speech as Prime Minister.

Let us first briefly reflect on some important points in the Conservative Party's history to provide some context for making sense of the speech we will analyse. The Conservative Party was in opposition from 1997 to 2010, a period that represented the "longest uninterrupted period out of office ... since 1832" (Snowdon, 2010: vii). During its time in opposition, the main pro-EU candidate for Conservative Party leadership, Ken Clarke, was repeatedly rejected by the Party membership, whilst the Eurosceptic leaders of the Conservative Party from 1997 to 2005, William Hague, Ian Duncan-Smith, Michael Howard, whilst elected by the membership, were resoundingly rejected by the electorate.[1] Whilst far from being pro-EU, David Cameron's victory in the 2005 membership ballot, against the Eurosceptic David Davis, put a more 'middle of the road' candidate in charge of the Conservative Party.

Cameron owed his victory to a belief that was gaining ground in both the political left and right, namely that "the route to electoral recovery was to recapture the centre ground." (Bale, 2010/11: 265) This reference to the 'centre ground' referred not only to policies on European integration but also social and economic policies. Indeed, this development suggested that "the Party finally began to make the kind of alterations to policies which stood some chance of signalling to a sceptical public that a party was genuinely changing its tune." (Bale, 2012/16:

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[1] In the case of Duncan-Smith, this rejection happened via opinion polling – he was never allowed to represent the Conservatives in an election.

2) However, this change was by no means uncontested and once Cameron was Prime Minister, the notion 'modern compassionate Conservative' was pragmatically replaced with the notion 'common sense Conservative' (Seldon & Snowdon, 2015: 275), which was more popular with the membership.

One of the themes of the Cameron government (2010-2016) was the slogan of the 'Big Society', which included "the sense of community, the importance of family and stability, and the value of charity and service." (Seldon & Snowdon, 2015: 150) Policies that departed from traditional Conservative social values were now enacted. Specifically, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government succeeded in passing legislation legalizing gay marriage, albeit relying on Liberal Democrat and Labour votes to do so (Seldon & Snowdon, 2015: 279). Indeed, a prominent Conservative backbencher criticised the legislation as breaking with rather than "protecting cherished institutions and our cultural heritage." (Seldon & Snowdon, 2015: 280)

Theresa May secured her position as Conservative party leader and Prime Minister following the resignation of David Cameron. Cameron had stepped down as Prime Minister on 24th June 2016 after the EU referendum result. Cameron had backed the Remain campaign and cited the Leave result and the need for "fresh leadership" as his reason for stepping down. May fought a brief campaign for leader and won by default after her only rival in the race Andrea Leadsom pulled out of the race. Many of the aforementioned Conservative party tensions on policy and direction continued to simmer during Cameron's tenure, not only on the EU but also social and economic policy, which formed the context for Theresa May's speech that we will now analyse. We think it is therefore fair to conclude that the audiences of this speech were both the electorate more broadly and the sceptics within the Conservative party membership more narrowly.

In what follows, we will analyse some of the categories used in the speech given by Theresa May on Wednesday 13th July 2016, on the steps of Downing Street, in May's first public address to the nation as Prime Minister. We will focus on those parts of the speech that involve reasoning about identity categories in particular (highlighted in bold):

> "I have just been to Buckingham Palace where Her Majesty the Queen has asked me to form a new government, and I accepted.

In David Cameron, I follow in the footsteps of a great, modern prime minister. Under David's leadership, the government stabilized the economy, reduced the budget deficit, and helped more people into work than ever before. But David's true legacy is not about the economy, but about social justice. From the introduction of same-sex marriage, to taking people on low wages out of income tax altogether. David Cameron has led a one nation government and it is in that spirit that I also plan to lead.

Because not everybody knows this, but the full title of my party is the Conservative and Unionist Party. And that word Unionist is very important to me. It means we believe in the Union. That precious, precious bond between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. But it means something else that is just as important. It means that we believe in a Union not just of the nations of the United Kingdom, but between all of our **citizens**. Every one of us, whoever we are and wherever we are from.

That means fighting against the burning injustice that if you are born **poor**, you will die on average nine years earlier than others. If you're **black**, you're treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than if you are white. If you're a **white, working-class boy**, you're less likely than anyone else in Britain to go to university. If you're at a **state school**, you're less likely to reach the top professions than if you were educated privately.

If you are a **woman**, you will earn less than a man. If you suffer from **mental health problems**, there's not enough help to hand. If you're **young**, you'll find it harder than ever before to own your own home. But the mission to make Britain a country that works for everyone means more than just fighting these injustices.

If you're from an **ordinary working-class family**, life is much harder than many people in Westminster realize. You have the job, but you don't always have the job security. You have your own home, but you worry about paying the mortgage. You can just about manage, but you worry about the cost of living and getting your kids into a good school. If you're one of those families. If you're just managing. I want to address you directly. I know you're working around the clock, I know you're doing your best, and I know that sometimes, life can be a struggle.

The government I lead will be driven not by the interests of a **privileged few**, but by yours. We will do everything we can to give you more control over your lives. When we take the big calls, we'll think not of **the powerful** but you. When we pass new laws, we'll listen not to **the mighty**, but you. When it comes to taxes we'll prioritize not **the wealthy**, but you. When it comes to opportunity, we won't entrench the advantages of the fortunate few. We will do everything we can to help anybody, whatever your background, to go as far as your talents will take you.

We are living through an important moment in our country's history. Following the referendum we face a time of great national change. And I know because we're Great Britain, we will rise to the challenge. As we leave the European Union, we will forge a bold, new positive role for ourselves in the world. And we will make Britain a country that works not for a **privileged few**, but for **every one of us**. That will be the mission of the government I lead, and together, we will build a better Britain."

The first membership category that May uses is that of 'citizen'. A form of moral reasoning is invoked when the concept of 'political union' between the four nations of the United Kingdom is used metaphorically to describe the 'sense of union' all British citizens should feel and display towards each other. This sense of moral responsibility to fellow citizens is picked up again in a series of identity categories tied together through the categorisation device "burning injustice". Using the rhetorical technique of anaphora so often used by politicians (Charteris-Black, 2014: 39-44), the identity categories tied together in the 'burning injustice' device are: poor, black, white-working class boy, state school educated, woman, mental health sufferer and young. May collects together these identity categories and ascribes a shared characteristic, namely sharing a "burning injustice" in the way they are treated in contemporary society, with each category in the list being ascribed its own manifestation of this injustice in terms of health, treatment by the criminal justice system, and various educational and economic opportunities. May presents "fighting against" these injustices as the political cause that her premiership will address.

In the next paragraph, however, May describes her party's "mission" as "more than just fighting these injustices". A new membership category is invoked that is positioned as deserving redress if "making Britain a country that works for everyone" is to be achieved: people from an "ordinary working-class family". Certain categories of people are implicitly excluded from this and the categories that follow: the middle classes, the upper classes, and the unemployed. What type of person the term 'ordinary' indexes is unclear until some later categories are invoked. Listeners and readers are invited to generate their own inferences based on the categories that are used thereafter: someone with a job that has little job security (ruling out of the category those with no jobs or secure jobs), those who own their own home but who worry about keeping up with mortgage payments (ruling out of the category those who rent, those who live with others and those without a home), those who worry about the cost of living and getting their kids into a good school (ruling out of the category those who are comfortably able to afford to live, those who do not have children, and those who have children but do not worry about their schooling). The use of the first person pronoun "you" attempts to make a direct identification with readers and listeners who identify with these categories. This is further reinforced by May's "direct address" to readers and listeners who identify with the category "just managing", of which incumbents are said to share the following category predicates: working around the clock, doing your best, finding life a struggle.

An epistemic contrast of categories of people with different knowledge-states is also set up in the speech. May contrasts the "many people in Westminster" who do not realise 'how hard life is' for members of categories within the aforementioned category devices ('burning injustice' and 'just about managing'). This categorical contrast is used to perform moral evaluation of fellow politicians who are expected to represent these 'ordinary citizens', but do not understand their situation. Interests are then brought into the frame alongside identities. May pledges to place the interests of those said to be suffering from these 'injustices' above the interests of a range of other categories in another anaphorical list: the 'privileged few', the 'powerful', the 'mighty', the 'wealthy', the 'fortunate few'. A categorization device is created comprising 'those who are wronged' and 'those who do wrong' using the devices of persecution (those subject to injustice and those carrying out injustices) and privilege (those who are struggling and those who are affluent).

May deploys categories in her speech to undertake a range of social actions. She uses categories as part of making a *plea* to the reader/listener: to feel a sense of union with each other and show compassion for those less fortunate. The categories are also deployed as part of sequences that engage in the act of *condemnation*: of burning injustices in society and the politicians who fail to understand the difficulties of ordinary working-class families. They are also deployed as part of acts of making *promises* and *pledges*: to ensure the actions of her Government are driven by the interests of ordinary working-class families not the privileged few. These social actions (making pleas, condemning, promising and pledging) were tied together in a moral landscape through the practical moral reasoning that these categories enabled: the lack of opportunity, safety and security afforded to members of categories for *unjust* reasons that demand action to be taken to rectify.

The kind of moral reasoning in May's speech represents a significant rhetorical shift for the Conservative party, which has traditionally been associated with representing the interests of the rich and powerful. To be clear, the point of an MCA analysis is not to assess the degree to which readers or listeners will agree with, identify with, or believe May's promises to the electorate (and as members of society we the authors may well share your skepticism towards this speech). Rather, the point of an MCA analysis is to reveal how stretches of talk-in-interaction or text assemble a version of the world through the use of membership categories and the forms of practical reasoning they seek to accomplish. In simple terms, then, May's speech uses membership categories to assemble a version of the world as 'unjust' and uses this version to warrant

her Government's political agenda. The speech performs 'ideology' in the sense that it seeks to use categorical reasoning to present a version of her party and her personal leadership agenda, building on the rhetoric of "compassionate conservatism" (Bale, 2010/11: 37, 148, 156) put forward by her predecessor David Cameron. The extent to which May and her ruling Conservative party have since delivered on those promises, we will leave the reader to judge for themselves.

Conclusion

We would like to conclude this chapter by reflecting on how categories, as a type of classification system, work to affect social relations. This question is of course of broader relevance to social theory (e.g. Bowker & Starr, 2000; Mulkay, 2014). Questions that explore the social origins and consequences of cognitive and linguistic categories have a long and distinguished place in sociological theory (Durkheim, 1915; Foucault, 1970; Bourdieu, 1998; Latour, 2005) and in anthropology (see for example Douglas (1966) on the classification of things into pure and impure). Within social psychology also, an influential sub-branch has emerged which has analysed the role of categories and categorization activities in the emergence of prejudice (Billig, 1985), anti-Semitism (Billig, 1987) and nationalism (Billig, 1995). This sub-branch has merged promisingly with the field known as discursive psychology, with the result that analyses focus on discursively visible and documentable social actions instead of mentalist categories (Edwards, 1991, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992). Our specific use of MCA should be seen as standing in this tradition and contributing to this strand of social theory. This tradition is grounded on the notion that people use categories in their talk and text in ways that are both socially, symbolically and materially consequential for the social action that then ensues. Categories do indeed reproduce social reality (Giddens, 1984) – it is one of the promises of MCA to show how *specifically* and *concretely* this social reality is achieved in language use.

In this chapter, we have introduced an approach to analysing the use of social categories in language known as Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA). MCA is predicated on acknowledging the importance of categorization in language, its function in "doing" or "constituting", rather than simply "describing". We have argued that it is crucial for language users - especially for those in critical positions such as political communication, PR and journalism - to become aware of this role of language and we have offered MCA as one way to expose this

function. MCA involves the study of the categories that people use in talk-in-interaction or written texts, focusing on the kinds of knowledge and reasoning that people draw on when they use categories and the kinds of practical activities that categories are used to accomplish. MCA invites us to study the "routine ordinary common-sense knowledge" people use to make sense of (and with) categories and what forms of "practical theorising" they accomplish in doing so (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2015: 3).

Table 1 provides an overview of some of the analytic concepts used in MCA, which we hope provides a useful reference point to students and practitioners of language in various professional settings.

Concept	Definition	Illustrative example(s)
Membership categorisation analysis	A qualitative methodology that studies the practices through which people use categories to make sense of the social world and interact with each other.	N/A
Membership category	Describing a person as a member of a social category.	Mother, doctor, Christian, immigrant, etc.
Membership categorisation device	A device that 'collects together' a number of categories in some kind of relationship and brings with it a set of more-or-less shared assumptions about how members of the collection relate to one another.	The device 'family' collects together a set of categories including: mother, father, baby, son, daughter, grandfather, grandmother, and so on. The device 'religion' collects together a set of categories including: Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and so on.

Category predicate	The set of characteristics that are typically associated with a particular category, including but not limited to: rights, responsibilities, obligations, entitlements, knowledge, beliefs and competencies.	Taken from Watson (1978): a vicar should *know* the circumstances of members of his or her congregation and has a moral *obligation* to offer support to those in need (without needing to be asked).
Practical reasoning	The forms of reasoning and inference that people undertake using categories in practical situations.	Marc Levine reasoned that female engineering students must be feminists because feminists fought for women to gain entry to traditionally male-dominated industries, such as engineering (see Eglin & Hester, 1999).
Social actions	The social actions that categories are used to accomplish, such as complaining, criticising, praising, blaming, admonishing, offering, accepting, declining, rejecting, and so on.	The act of *criticising* using a stage of life device: "Don't act like such a baby". The act of *praising* using a stage of life device: "He acts very mature for his age" (adapted from Antaki & Widdicome, 1998: 138-140).

| Normative and moral infrastructure | The way in which categories are used to infer, invoke or enact social norms and values, i.e. what is considered 'normal', 'right' or 'valued' and what is not. | Marc Levine reasoned that the female engineering students he shot represented a threat to his beliefs about the 'right' and 'proper' place of women in the patriarchal vision of society he endorsed. He wanted his act of mass murder to be interpreted as part of a war of competing value-systems: feminist revolutionaries and anti-feminist counter-revolutionaries. |

Table 1 Overview of some key concepts used in Membership Categorisation Analysis

In this chapter, we have provided two examples of an MCA analysis. The first was from Eglin and Hester's (1999) analysis of the talk of a mass murderer. The second was our analysis of a political speech by British Prime Minister, Theresa May. To conclude the chapter, it is worth reflecting on what these two examples share and how they differ, in order to draw some broader conclusions about how MCA generates insights into the (re-)structuring social relations through language. The two examples share in common the use of membership categories that present those being portrayed not as unique individuals but rather as *members of social groups*: in the first case 'feminists', in the second case those experiencing 'burning injustice' and 'ordinary working class families', amongst a range of other categories. Despite their apparent differences, the two examples also share in common their use within a political agenda of 'fighting against injustices'. In the first case, the membership category 'feminist' is used to cast the gunman's targets as representatives of the category of people who were creating injustices against men that he was seeking to counter. According to the gunman's category-based reasoning procedure, the feminist revolution he was witnessing in society were generating injustices that justified his counter-revolutionary actions. Here, categorical reasoning was used to fuel

and legitimate social conflict, division and violence. Although the term 'ideology' is not typically used in MCA, we believe that MCA can be used as part of an ideological analysis by revealing how systems of belief include forms of categorical reasoning that are used by people to justify, in the eyes of their adherents, acts of domination, oppression and violence.

In May's speech, membership categories were also employed to highlight injustices in society. However, May's category-based reasoning about social injustice was used not to legitimate conflict and division; rather, it was used to appeal to a sense of social solidarity and moral responsibility of the fortunate that would help the less fortunate in society, which May claimed would guide her Government. What at first sight appear to be very different social phenomena, turn out to have strikingly similar properties of reasoning-through-categories. For the gunman, the injustice had been caused by feminists and his solidarity lay with the category 'men', who are characterized as unfairly disadvantaged by the new feminist social order. May lists a series of injustices uniting a range of social categories (poor, black, white-working class boy, state school educated, woman, mental health sufferer, young, and those who struggle to pay mortgages, have job security and get their kids into good schools). May positions herself as acting in solidarity with all these categories of 'unjustly treated' people, singling out for responsibility (and blame) the 'privileged few', 'powerful', 'mighty' and 'wealthy'. The fight that May rhetorically positioned herself within was not however a violent struggle like the gunman's, but rather a political and economic struggle against social injustice to be fought through the policies of her ruling Government.

The reader may well find themselves sharing some of the same common-sense assumptions about categories in one speech but not the other. Categories do not 'hold' a set of predicates and associated moral reasoning, as if they were a fixed property or attribute. The degree to which people share understandings of categories is also historically and culturally variable. Across history, the reasoning and predicates associated with the categories 'women' and 'men' have changed dramatically and continue to do so today. They also differ considerably across societies around the world today. The term 'common-sense reasoning' can be misleading considering the fact that people sometimes *do not* share in common the same reasoning about a social category. This is an important point for any student or practitioner studying or using categories in talk or text because the degree to which categories (and the practical sociological

reasoning they are used to accomplish) are 'shared in common' and 'stable over time' is an empirical question that is open to investigation[2].

Categorical reasoning therefore needs to be studied as an *indexical* and *situated* phenomenon. The same person can produce different accounts of a category and its associated predicates in different contexts, or indeed different accounts in the same context. Different people can also produce competing versions of categories when interacting with each other[3]. The understanding of categories across social groups, organisations, institutions or societies can also change, slowly or dramatically, over time. Thus, rather than see categories as pre-existing entities that 'bring with them' particular attributes, categories are studied in-situ for how they are produced and used in particular contexts at particular times. Contemporary work in MCA therefore "eschews the analytical location of categories within specific, stable culturally defined collections" (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002: 68) in favour of studying how categories are used in both stable and shared, but also variable and contested ways, as part of the accomplishment of social actions and (re-)shaping of social relations. In studying the role of categories in this way, we hope the reader takes away at least one analytic skill to be used in their own practice as language professionals: awareness of the power of categories in transforming social relations in both its oppressive and dominating form and its emancipating and enabling form.

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[2] Stokoe (2012: 281) gives the example of the decline in use of terms such as 'male nurse' as making social change visible and analytically tractable through the ways in which categories (and their combinations) fade out of use or get replaced with others.
[3] See for example Watson's (1978) analysis of the two versions of moral obligations of a vicar by a caller and counsellor to a suicide prevention centre.

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