Identity, Positioning and Self-Other Relations

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This paper contributes to our understanding of the relation between social representations and identity using the concept of position. For this purpose two conceptualisations of the terms position and positioning are explored: Duveen's theorisation of identity as a position towards a social representation and positioning theory's concept of positions as discursive achievements. It is argued that the two conceptualisations can be integrated to provide a clearer view of the impact of recognition and legitimacy in identity processes. This claim is supported by a case study derived from an interview study on naturalisation and identity in the United Kingdom.

The aim of this paper is to elucidate the links between social representations and social identities by exploring the self-other relations involved in identity construction. Apart from being a set of meanings about oneself (content), identity is also defined as a process which incorporates identifying oneself and being recognised by others. Identity is, therefore, seen here as embedded in social relations and as dynamic, contextual and relational. Social representations and the dynamics of positioning between self and other define identities.

This paper argues that the notion of positioning can contribute towards clarifying the relational character of identity. For this purpose, two conceptualisations of positioning will be analysed. First, positioning as conceptualised by scholars of social representations, especially Gerard Duveen, and secondly, positioning from the point of view of positioning theory that stems from a discursive approach, will be explored.

The paper concludes that the social representations perspective developed by Duveen and colleagues is successful in theorising the social-individual dynamics in processes of identity construction by taking under consideration the role of recognition in knowledge construction processes. On the other hand, positioning theory elaborates the power dynamics involved and the character of positions through a consideration of the rights and duties associated with identity positions. It will be argued that the integration of the two approaches helps elucidate the role of the 'other' in identity construction especially with regards to issues of identity legitimation and possibilities for change and negotiation. This claim will be explicated by empirical data from a case study derived from interviews with naturalised citizens in the United Kingdom.

POSITIONING AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

Moscovici's social representations theory is based on what he calls a 'systematic social psychology' (Moscovici, 2000). Moscovici defines this approach as follows: "the relationship between Ego and Object is mediated through the intervention of another subject; this relationship becomes a complex triangular one in which each of the terms is fully determined by the other two" (2000, p. 107). This relationship among self, other and object/representation forms the unit of analysis in social representations theory (Marková, 2000, 2003). Based on this premise, Marková argues that the relation between self and other should be fundamental in theorising identity: "One cannot meaningfully ask the question about identity without posing the question about self and other. And one cannot talk about social representations as a theory of social knowledge without examining public discourses in which different dialogues between the Ego and the Alter take place and through which they generate representations" (Marková, 2007, p. 219).

Gerard Duveen has incorporated the self-other-object triangle in his theorisation of identity. His main proposition is that social representations provide various possible identities which allow people to position themselves in a variety of ways in relation to the symbolic field of culture (Duveen, 1993). These identities, taken on and negotiated by individuals, help them structure their social world and orient themselves

within this world. Thus, social representations provide both the meanings related to an object as well as the positions towards that object that are available for people; meanings and positions are the two components of social identities (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990). Within this perspective, social identities "reflect individuals' efforts to situate themselves in their societies in relation to the social representations of their societies" (Duveen & Lloyd, 1986, p. 220). In other words, identities can be defined as positions in relation to social representations since people make sense of themselves and their experiences by drawing on and reconstructing social representations (Duveen, 1993, 2001; Duveen & Lloyd, 1986, 1990).

Duveen went further in exploring the role of identity in structuring the communicative practices linked with knowledge construction. Drawing on Piaget's distinction between symmetric and asymmetric social relations (cooperation and constraint), Duveen and colleagues have explored the role of recognition in cognitive development (Duveen & Psaltis, 2008; Leman & Duveen, 1999; Psaltis & Duveen. 2006, 2007). These studies have principally examined the mediation of social representations of gender in communication processes and their impact on knowledge construction. The results of these studies demonstrate that recognition can be hindered or facilitated by the social representations of gender. Based on the bipolar male-female, the social representations of gender position men as more knowledgeable than women. In other words, the knowledge produced by men is perceived as more 'valid' than the knowledge produced by women. People 'act through' these social representations and therefore, these representations shape the interactions between people. This has an impact on knowledge construction because different self-other relations correspond to different communication types which give rise to different kinds of knowledge construction processes. For instance, in the studies of Duveen and colleagues, it was shown that interactions characterised by recognition produced 'intellectual exchange' type process of knowledge construction with resulted in the production of more original knowledge by children (Psaltis & Duveen, 2006; Duveen & Psaltis, 2008).

Therefore, it is the quality of self-other relations that shapes knowledge construction. From this perspective, identity and (mis-)recognition are crucial in social

representation processes (Psaltis, 2005). Social representations provide people with a variety of positions but these positions are further elaborated by one's relations with an 'other'. Positioning theory, stemming from a discourse-oriented framework, can further contribute to our understanding of positioning processes and self-other interactions through the concepts of rights and duties.

SELF AND OTHER POSITIONING IN DISCOURSE

Under a different framework, but still within a constructionist perspective, discourse psychology makes a similar link between knowledge and identity. In an effort to de-essentialise the notion of self and identity, discourse psychologists use the term subject position to refer to the process by which people are located within the realm of discourses.

Focusing on the level of language use and meaning construction through discourse, Harré and colleagues have developed positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003a; Harré & van Langehove, 1991, 1999a). They use the term positioning as an alternative to the idea of personhood and to the concept of role. Within this perspective, identity and the self are discursively produced in the course of communication. Societal discourses make available a range of positions, that is, a set of categories that people identify with, as well as their meanings. Due to its 'here-and-now' quality, positioning can be seen as a conceptualisation of 'doing identities' in talk.

This perspective is comparable with the social representations approach in that positions not only 'locate' people within social relations and discursive 'storylines', but also provide people with ways of making sense of the world: "A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights and duties for those who use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned" (Davies & Harré, 1999, p. 35).

Positioning theory conceptualises the 'other' as an integral part of the positioning process. Positionings are always jointly (re)produced and relational, meaning that the adoption of a position always assumes a position for the interlocutor as well – positioning processes involve both self and other positions (van Langehove & Harré, 1999).

Positioning theory also considers the power dynamics that shape interactions and positioning processes through the concept of moral orders. Every position has a 'moral quality' in the sense that it is associated with a set of rights and duties which delimit what can be said or done from a certain position, in a particular context and towards a particular interlocutor (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003b; Harré & van-Langehove, 1999b). For instance, on an inter-group level, dominant groups have more legitimate voices and produce more 'valid' representations; they are more 'entitled' to speak and to be heard (Tan & Moghaddam, 1999).

Therefore, positions have been conceptualised both as identity positions and as sets of rights and duties. More recently, the positioning triangle for the construction of meaning (positions, storylines, social forces of discursive acts) has been extended to a positioning diamond that distinguishes between identities, on the one hand, and rights and duties, on the other hand (Slocum-Bradley, 2009). Thus, identity is conceptualised as a discursive construct and refers to the attribution of character, group membership and other meanings to an actor, while rights and duties refer to the moral order associated with this position. This distinction is useful for the elaboration of self-other relations and the consideration of power dynamics and norms in shaping those relations.

INTEGRATING THE TWO APPROACHES: RECOGNITION AND MORAL ORDERS

For Duveen, recognition or the absence of recognition is a key issue in knowledge and identity construction because it defines the self-other relations involved in a context. In Duveen and colleagues' studies an individual may be recognised as knowledgeable or misrecognised as unknowledgeable. This is essentially a matter of legitimacy as defined by existing power dynamics and social hierarchies (Leman & Duveen, 1999). In Duveen's gender studies young girls were positioned as lacking the expertise to solve the experiment task, while boys were positioned as having more expertise, thus, their knowledge was more legitimate.

Issues of legitimacy and entitlement are intertwined with the allocation of rights and duties but, as Moghaddam argues, "despite the centrality of rights and duties in relationships within and between groups, rights and duties remain almost completely neglected in research on groups" (2006, p. 169). Positioning theory provides a detailed view of such dialogical asymmetries because it emphasises both the attributed characteristics of actors as well as their associated rights and duties in a particular context. Positioning theory conceptualises power dynamics and legitimacy in terms of entitlements for action and participation. In positioning theory's terms, the girls of Duveen's studies, positioned as less knowledgeable, had the duty to listen to the boys and a limited right to contribute to the research task. Therefore, they were less entitled to participate in knowledge construction. Simultaneously, the boys, positioned as knowledgeable, had the right to express their view and the duty to provide the right answer. In other words, there was an unequal distribution of 'epistemic responsibility' (Rommetveit, 1991). It can be argued that moral orders are the normative aspect of the social representations that define gender and attribute gender identity positions to boys and girls.

Assessing the quality of self-other relations is crucial in understanding identity processes. Using the idea of rights and duties as associated with identity positions, we can stress the impact of power dynamics in our conceptualisation of identity. While the terms recognition and misrecognition define broadly the quality of self-other

relations, rights and duties provide a more detailed view of the quality of the positions towards the 'other' embedded in these relations. The next section will illustrate how rights and duties work to legitimise or de-legitimise identity positions using a case study from a set of interview data on naturalisation and identity in the UK.

NATURALISATION AND IDENTITY POSITIONS

The case study presented here is drawn from an interview study with thirty-three naturalised citizens of the United Kingdom conducted by the author during 2007-08. The aim of this research was to explore identity processes associated with processes of migration and naturalisation in the UK.

As anticipated, the new British citizens that took part in the research were familiar with stereotypes and discrimination against migrants in Britain. The representations of migration and migrants are based on ideas of ethno-cultural difference and undesirability. The theme of undesirability is based on the image of the migrant as an ungrateful abuser of Britain's resources and is intertwined with representations of difference and of Britishness. The ways that participants positioned themselves in relation to these representations were dependent on the 'other' that was evoked in the interviews and the associated self-other relations.

The participant whose interview is used here was born in China and has Chinese origins, but has been living in Britain since she was a young child. She was twenty years old at the time of the interview. The participant defined herself predominantly as British even before acquiring the British citizenship. However, it has been a struggle for her to be accepted as British. In the extract that follows she describes her experience of being excluded from the definition of Britishness and her efforts to be recognised.

> Participant: I've tried to apply for GAP and then I hand in my CV, when I turned around the manager ripped it off
> Eleni: Really?

Participant: I saw it and then I just thought, because, and I've changed my name as well. And the only reason is to prevent a discrimination.

Eleni: In terms of ethnicity?

Participant: I mean, my old name, previous name was [...], it's a lovely name in Chinese, but it doesn't work in English. It's not feminine, it's not elegant, it's different from others. Then I thought, I think I have to change it just for the sake of getting good jobs. And also I did study in A-level as well, there was a study on discrimination. So there's two CVs, same education, and there's one called, for example, Mohamed Abudu or something and the other one is John Smith, for example. And then, the most, see the management, they would select John Smith rather than Mohamed Abudu or something which is because of the name and your ethnicity. And I think, if I apply for a British passport and change my name, it would be easier for me. But then in a way, I still feel I'm British, but people don't accept it in that aspect.

Comparing herself to the 'norm' this participant 'lacks' Britishness because she has Chinese heritage. She is being positioned as 'other' by representations that define Britishness as an ethnic identity. The ethnic representations of Britishness do not allow her to position herself as 'fully British'; in other words, this identity does not seem to be available to her ('I still feel I'm British, but people don't accept it in that aspect'). The social relations shaping this positioning are based on the misrecognition of different ethnic backgrounds. The participant experiences this as a form of exclusion and in order to be included, to be recognised as British, she changed her name and applied for British citizenship – a strategy that social identity theorists have termed 'social mobility' (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In making efforts to become 'more British', she is in a way 'acting through' the dichotomising and exclusionary representations of Britishness. The moral order established in this context is that she is not entitled to be 'British-proper', due to her ethnic background, and she has the duty to abide by this ethno-cultural definition of Britishness and make efforts to assimilate. This moral order constraints her possibilities to change and negotiate these identities and representations.

In an effort to be recognised, the participant employs a different comparison context and redefines the moral order of the situation. In the next extract when she speaks about the naturalisation process she positions herself as legitimately British in contrast to other migrants.

Participant: I know all the norms and values. You know, you don't have to be tested to prove you can be the citizen. To myself, without the passport or with it, it doesn't make a difference. You know? I *belong* here. That's what I feel like, that's what I believe, I'm, you know, in the society [...] In the nationalisation the other day, I feel I'm an outsider.

Eleni: An outsider?

Participant: Yeah. I don't know, it's a strange feeling, it's like looking at those people

Eleni: In the ceremony?

Participant: In the ceremony, in the ceremony. I feel, hold on a minute, I'm a British no matter if I'm applying for it, I'm not, I'm British. It won't make a difference. You know?

Eleni: What do you mean? How were the other people compared to you?

Participant: Well, I speak English most of the times, I think in English, I speak English […] If you're looking at them, you think, do they actually deserve to be a British citizen?

Eleni: Who do you think deserves to be a British citizen?

Participant: Everybody. But you have to, obviously you have to follow the rules and the, you know, the traditional views of this country. I mean that's what I like as well. But, then those people don't speak English […] they cannot actually communicate with you, that's the reason. I may just be judgemental, I don't know, stereotype […] I heard stories, but I don't know if they're true or not. It's like the test, they pay for the people working in the centres so if they're same race and then they roughly look the same and they pay you like 300 pounds for those people to do it for you.

In the beginning of the quotation the participant argues that she 'feels like an outsider' because representations of Britishness and immigration as well as the institutionalised practices of naturalisation position her in the same group as 'newcomers'. This is again an instance of misrecognition. The social representations of Britishness that position her as 'other' are still at play here. However, in line with Duveen's (1993) framework, the assimilatory ethnic representation of Britishness constructs a range of identity positions that can be potentially taken on depending on the ethnic background and level of assimilation of migrants. The participant by redefining her relationship with other migrants (from being the same to being different from them) is able to take on a different position, that of an assimilated new British citizen, which is associated with more rights towards British identity. Her legitimacy to be British is derived from the moral order employed in this occasion. The moral order is that she has the right to be British and the duty to assimilate to Britishness by dissociating herself from her Chinese background. On the other hand, the migrants she refers to do not have the right to be British and have (failed) the duty to abide by naturalisation regulations and assimilate to the mainstream culture. As Slocum-Bradley (2006) argues, failing to fulfil one's duties de-legitimates an actor. Thus, the participant claims that these migrants 'do not deserve' to be British citizens because they have not assimilated and abuse the immigration system. In contrast, she is legitimated because she has fulfilled her duty to learn 'the norms and values' of the country.

Overall, the national boundaries are redrawn during the interview in relation to different positioning processes which construct different self-other relations and define the legitimacy of self and other's entitlements towards British identity. In accordance with the ethnic representations of Britishness, the participant is positioned as an outsider with limited rights towards Britishness. By delegitimising other migrants she redefines this moral order and acquires more rights towards British identity. Thus, the national boundaries are dynamic and negotiable and a person can be included on one level but excluded on another. This depends on the types of self-other relations that are established and the voices that are being legitimated and recognised.

CONCLUSIONS

Identity has been conceptualised here as a position towards an 'other' in relation to a social representation. The term position allows us to view identity as a relational and dynamic process. Taking this into account, the aim of this paper has been to integrate two conceptualisations of the term position, one by Duveen and colleagues and one by positioning theory, in order to elaborate the relations between self and other in identity processes. It has been argued that terms such as recognition, constraint or cooperation define the quality of self-other relations (that shape communicative practices), while the concepts of rights and duties (by defining what can be said or done from a certain position) can help to further conceptualise the nature of the positions involved in these social relations and the possibilities for change and contestation. In terms of national identity, asymmetry in the allocation of rights and duties of migrants and native populations is indicative of power differentials. This has implications for the 'level of belonging' that naturalised citizens can claim and for the 'amount of recognition' they receive.

A final comment to be made here is that the integration of Duveen's and positioning theory's approaches can be a useful framework for the study of contemporary identity struggles. Moghaddam (2003) argues that a focus on duties, rather than rights, can be said to be typical of majority discourses that aim to sustain their power towards the minorities, whereas 'rights talk' is employed more often by disadvantaged groups that want to upgrade their status. In terms of identity politics, such rights claims refer to the public recognition of minority ethnic or cultural identities, since reciprocal recognition lies at the heart of justice issues in contemporary world (Taylor, 1992; Honneth, 1995; Fraser, 1997). By linking identity, recognition and rights and duties, we have therefore a useful framework for discussing current intergroup dynamics.

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