Multi-positioning of the self and the other in a radio documentary about the work of an anthropologist: (co-)constructing truth and silence in a case of incest

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Abstract:
This study is based on the transcription of a radio documentary broadcasted on the French radio channel France Culture in 2008. In the show, a journalist joined an anthropologist during her fieldwork in a French suburb in order to find out about how the inhabitants of a council estate perceived the “mission” of the anthropologist. Based on a dialogic conception of the self and the other, which goes “beyond identity” (Cooper & Brubaker, 2000), and considers that interaction is composed of acts of co-construction of the self leading to un/stable multi-positioning, my study will explore how the field subjects position the anthropologist when asked about her job, as well as the actors involved in the case of incest.

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“We cannot give an undistorted account of a “person” without giving an account of his relation with others. Even an account of one person cannot afford to forget that each person is always acting upon others and acted upon by others. The others are there also. No one acts or experiences in a vacuum”.
R.D. Laing (1961: 81-82)

This study is based on the transcription of an episode of Les Pieds sur terre, a radio documentary broadcasted on the French radio channel France Culture in 2008. In the show, a journalist accompanied an anthropologist during her fieldwork in a French suburb in order to find out about how the inhabitants of a council estate perceived the “mission” of the anthropologist. This is a very intriguing and interesting case of “identity construction”, as anthropologists are seldom confronted with their own field subjects (Bensa 2008). The field in question was caught up in a case of incest a few years ago, which had been highly mediatised in France. The anthropologist’s interest lays in how the people dealt with it, being those closely involved in the crime and the others.
Based on a dialogic and liquid conception of the self (Bauman 2004; Dervin 2008), which goes “beyond identity” (Cooper & Brubaker 2000), and considers that interaction is composed of acts of co-construction of the self and the other, leading to unstable multi-positioning and “metamorphoses” (Dervin, 2008), my study explores how the field subjects position the anthropologist when asked about what her research is about. Following Laing’s call at the beginning of this article for the compulsory inclusion of “the other” in examining the self, this study will look at multi-positioning or how voices included in discourse allow for the construction of identification.

An increasing number of scholars agree that theoretical work has moved ahead of methodological advances in the cross-/inter-disciplinary fields of dialogism and the dialogical self1. As such, existent methodologies are often individualistic and are unable to study dialogical phenomena (Gillespie & Cornish 2009), which do not agree - to borrow Laing’s phrase - with the “vacuum” of individualistic monologism (cf. also Markova et al. 2007). This paper is thus an attempt at pushing the boundaries of dialogical analysis by using tools from linguistic theories of enunciation and dialogism (Marnette 2005). These will allow me to demonstrate how all the actors (including the anthropologist) co-construct their selves and the other when discourses on the anthropologist are blended in with discourses on the incest case.

1. Dialogical self/Dialogicity

The Dialogical Self (sometimes referred to as Dialogicity, Linell 2009) is an interdisciplinary movement highly influenced by the work of M. Bakhtine, which has representatives in, amongst others, social psychology (Markova, Gillespie), interaction studies (Grossen, Salazar Orvig, Linell), psychology (Hermans) and social sciences (Billig). Dialogicity is in fact a counter-theory to monologism as it provides a “more abstract and comprehensive sense of dialogue” (Linell 2009: 5). In this paper, and in accordance with this, dialogicity represents any kind of sense-making, semiotic practice, action, interaction, thinking or communication, which is based on the “self-others interdependence” (Markova et al. 2007: 1). In other words, the underlying hypothesis of this paper is that there is no ego without the other(s), no voice without other voices and no sense-making without other sense-makers (Linell 2009: 36), be it in discourse or in action. These last two elements are themselves inscribed in a range of future, present, past, and anticipated discourses, which cannot but play a role in acts of interaction. Besides, Linell (2009: 14) reminds us that contexts but also history and “culture”, which are always in the process of changing, influence human interaction.

In terms of actors/subjects, this means that an explanatory model based on a pragmatic triad (I/you/it) is not sufficient. Linell (2009: 95) suggests the following “diamond” – or a diagrammatic form – to describe the complexity involved in dialogicity:

Figure 1

Socioculture (we; one...)

1 Cf. the International Society for Dialogical Science website at http://web.lemoyne.edu/~hevern/ISDS/
As far as identity is concerned, this “Diamond” corroborates the idea that selves and others are co-constructed - a point that has been put forward many a time by scholars in different fields (cf. Cooper & Brubaker 2000 for a review).

2. Multi-Positioning

Theoretically, dialogicity but also paradigms such as postmodernism have pinpointed the plurality of selves and refuted the singularity of identity. Nevertheless, analytically, there is often a lack of valid tools. This is where linguistic theories of enunciation, founded by various groups of French discourse analysists, have been complementing the dialogical movement. These theories put forward the idea that enunciative positions taken on by speakers (i.e. the way they put themselves on the scene to construct their identity) are unstable and that this leads to instability of discourses (i.e. objects) shared and co-constructed by people (Vion 1998) and “identity metamorphoses” (Dervin 2008). The enunciative positions taken on by speakers fluctuate and lead to what I call “multi-positioning”, i.e. multiple, often unprogrammed acts of positioning and repositioning (Hermans 2004), depending on the presence of in/visible others in discourse. As such, every discursive act is based on internal/external positioning:
- internal positions: *I as a lecturer, I as a neighbour, I as a father*...
- external positions: “refer to people and objects that are (...) relevant from the perspective of one or more internal positions” (Hermans 2004: 252).

Furthermore, various interactive acts take place between these positions:
- internal positions between themselves (*I said to myself*)
- internal and external positions
- external positions between themselves (*Paul said to Henry*...)…

This multi-positioning is dependent on various elements, which we have mentioned earlier: the object/interlocutor(s)/situation/context/interdiscursivity... In terms of linguistic production, these aspects can take place through the use of various pronouns, modality/modalisation, subjective markers, (free) direct or indirect reported speech and all the ‘hybridized’ quotative forms (cf. Marnette 2005; Dervin 2008; Suomela-Salmi & Dervin 2009 for a full presentation of these elements). Enunciation theorists have studied these phenomena convincingly.

Finally, as far as the concrete voices are concerned, they can include, on top of the obvious interlocutor positions:
- Virtual participants/speakers (Markova et al. 2007: 99);
- The self (as in I said to myself…);
- “Constructed collectivities” (Markova et al. 2007: 158) in which one voice speaks for all and covers a whole range of identical enunciators;
- Common sense or the doxa, etc.

Let us also bear in mind that while some voices are identifiable, some are not. Theories of enunciation tell us that these multiple voices allow for discursive strategies in the construction of positioning.

All in all, what we set about to do now could be labeled as “dialogical discourse analysis” (Linell 2009; Markova et al. 2007). Without being idealistic (many dialogical phenomena can’t be analysed, such as “hidden interdiscourse”), the method endeavours to identify some of the voices used by speakers in their own discourse and see what usage are made of them in terms of multi-positioning and identification.

3. Study

3.1. About the corpus

The corpus for this study is a transcription of a weekly radio programme broadcasted on France Culture in November 2008. The programme is described by its creator and producer, Sonia Krönlund, as a “documentary without commentary”\(^2\). Each episode lasts 30 minutes and is recorded on site. The episode that we are analyzing was recorded in a French suburb (there was no indication of the geographical location). The primary aim of the program, which was part of France Culture’s day tribute to the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, is first and foremost to provide listeners with the portrait of an anthropologist but also to examine the perception of her role. The context is that of a suburb where a famous case of incest (father-daughter) took place 10 years earlier. Six participants are heard during the programme: the interviewer (producer Sonia Krönlund), the anthropologist, the victim, and her ex-neighbours (i.e. a mother, a father and their daughter). The programme is divided into three sections: 1. the anthropologist, accompanied by the interviewer discuss with the victim’s ex-neighbours (duration: 7m); 2. Sonia Krönlund talks to the anthropologist (duration: 3m); 3. the victim discusses with the anthropologist and the interviewer (duration: 7m).

Concentrating on the internal and external positions identified through voices in the corpus, three positioning strategies will be looked at in the analysis: 1. opposing voices; 2. impersonating voices and 3. the use of one’s own voice(s).

Before moving on to the analysis, let us remember that several elements may impact on what the interlocutors co-construct, which, as an “external member” of the act of interaction, we cannot really assess: e.g. the pressure of the microphone, the presence of the radio representative and the anthropologist herself, the interdiscourse they share... For example, it is interesting to note that at the end of the first section of the programme, the

producer integrated the following words from the ex-neighbours: “I hope we didn’t ramble on too much”\(^3\), which could indicate that the fact that the programme was recorded for the radio was borne in mind by the speakers. Finally, it should be mentioned that we are working on an orthographic transcription of the episode, as this reduces the complexity of the acts of interaction and dialogicity.

4. Analysis
4.1. Opposing voices

Let us start the analysis by looking at how voices are opposed by the speakers during the episode. In the first excerpts, this strategy is used by the ex-neighbours and the victim in order to position the anthropologist and praise her, but also to position “others”, and the self. External voices only were found in this section: the anthropologist’s voice vs. some voices which are not fully identifiable (the media? “people”? etc.). In linguistic terms, negative forms, passive voices, comparative and restrictive forms have been identified as tools to integrate these voices into their discourses.

We begin with imprecise, or “present-absent” voices, in the qualification of the anthropologist. In the two following excerpts, both the daughter and the mother praise the anthropologist, whose voice can be “heard”. In doing so, they oppose her voice to unidentifiable voices:

(1) **Daughter:** elle est arrivée avec une ouverture d’esprit pas un truc complètement fermé pas un regard complètement négatif sur la cité elle nous a laissé le temps de nous exprimer elle nous a laissé le temps de s’approvisionner

*She was open-minded from the beginning not with a closed attitude not with a completely negative attitude towards the suburb she gave us some time to express ourselves she gave us time to get used to each other*

(2) **Mother:** c’est tout en douceur avec elle pis quand on habite les banlieues on n’a pas l’habitude d’être chouchoutés comme ça

*It is quite soft with her and then when you live in the suburbs you are not used to being pampered like that*

The linguistic strategies used to do that consist in “erasing” the others’ voices by inserting negative sentences, which implies that the others are different from her: “not with a closed attitude not with a completely negative attitude towards the suburb” (excerpt 1) and in including a passive voice with a generic “you” as subject: “you are not used to being pampered like that” (excerpt 2). The resulting constructed identity of the anthropologist is positive.

Though the image is very similar in the following two excerpts, there is, however, a higher degree of identification of the opposed voices:

(3) **Mother:** J’ai l’impression qu’elle est rentrée dans ma vie elle a fait ce que peu de gens font s’intéresser aux autres

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\(^3\) All the excerpts were translated from French by myself. The excerpts below are accompanied by the originals.
I feel that she has entered my life she did what few people do, take an interest in others

(4) **Victim:** elle me met en confiance non mais non pis elle m’a pas laissé tomber non elle est toujours là pas comme les autres télé radio demander des nouvelles pour savoir où on en est non elle est là
She makes me at ease well then she didn’t abandon me no she is always there not like the others the television or radio (PEOPLE) (...)

The negative linguistic strategy is also present in these excerpts through restrictive forms: “few people” (3) and “not like the other” (4). The other people and the media (radio, television) are labeled negatively through these comparisons, while the anthropologist is once again put forward positively by both the ex-neighbour and the victim herself.

In a similar vein, when talking about other people, the victim opposes two images of the people who live in her suburb, who assert that they didn’t know about the case. It is clear that she suspects them to have known about it (and thus to share a different position):

(5) **Victim:** y en a qui disent maintenant ah ben oui on savait pas on savait pas bon après t’entendais les gens qui passaient à côté de nous qui disaient ah ben c’est son père qui lui faisait les gosses pourquoi maintenant ils vont dire que ils savaient pas
Some people say now well we didn’t know we didn’t know then you could hear the people who passed us say her dad made her pregnant why do they now say that they didn’t know

Direct voices are heard in this excerpt through the inclusion of represented discourses (Some people say… you could hear the people… why do they say now…). Once again, an evaluation of these voices is present: “why do they now say that they didn’t know”, which puts their voices into question (and thus their identity as “honest people”).

In the next excerpt, the ex-neighbour (the mother) reenacts a dialogue that she had with another person. By placing this dialogue into her discourse, she wants to provide evidence of her not knowing about the father having made the victim pregnant. In order to do so, she uses represented discourses (he told me, I told him…):

(6) **Mother:** quand j’ai passé mon code mon moniteur il m’a dit mais vous êtes pas au courant? Il lui a fait des enfants des garçons je lui ai dit mais personne ne fait rien et lui il avait pas l’air d’être choqué hein le moniteur il a dit ben c’est comme ça quoi voilà moi je savais pas qu’il lui avait fait des enfants
When I took my driving license my instructor told me what you don’t know about it? he is the father of the boys I said to him but nobody does anything about it and he didn’t seem to be shocked he said well that’s the way it is there I myself didn’t know that he was the father of her children

In a way, what she is doing here is to oppose two entities: those who knew about the situation (symbolised by the driving instructor) and remained silent versus her own self who didn’t know about it. The whole dialogue, through the insertion of opposed voices, leads to a coda, a conclusion, which frees the mother of all suspicions: “I myself didn’t know that he is the father of her children”. All in all, the ex-neighbour’s positioning (i.e. identity) is boosted by the insertion of this “piece of evidence”, i.e. the enacted dialogue.
It is clear from the examples supra that opposing voices in discourse plays several discursive roles. Amongst the identified strategies, I have found: to denounce “silence/truth, evaluate other voices, position culprits, make accusations, and define one’s own position (and show a “positive face”). It is interesting to note that the various speakers used similar external voices in the programme, when they talked about the anthropologist and the “witnesses”. This could show that the strategy of opposing (often unidentifiable) voices is common in talking about such a taboo case, where truth and silence are debated.

2. Impersonating voices

In this section, we look at the phenomenon of impersonating voices – a strategy which is also quite usual in voicing and multi-positioning truth and silence. These voices were used mostly to denounce attitudes were mostly not identifiable. As in the previous section, in/direct represented discourses and the “chameleon” French pronoun on (which receives various translations in English: generic you, one, we, they… cf. Boutet 1988) were used but also deontic modalities (“must”) (Le Querler 1996).

Let us examine unclear voices first. While the ex-neighbour used indirect voices when she was praising the anthropologist (and thus attacking others), when she talks about some “people who live in her building”, who witnessed the case of incest, she accuses them of being unfair by means of generic referents (they) and introduces their voice in a free indirect represented voice:

(7) Mother: t’as des gens dans l’immeuble ils ne comprennent pas ils disent y en a qui disent si elle a subi ça c’est qu’elle a bien voulu
There are people in the building who don’t understand they say some say if she endured that’s because she wanted it

The anthropologist resorts to the same strategy when she talks to the interviewer in the second section about the same people. The represented discourse is introduced here by “ça devient”, which is even more indirect:

(8) Anthropologist: ben oui ils banalisent les faits tout à coup ça devient ben oui on savait et alors? ou bien on ne savait pas mais y en a plein d’autres des cas comme ça et ils passent à autre chose
Well yes they trivialise the facts all of a sudden they say well yes we knew and? or we didn’t know and there are many other such cases and then they talk about something else

According to her, the case was trivialised by the people who knew about it and the use of “ça devient” (translated by “all of a sudden they say”, while in French the phrase is impersonal - literally “it becomes”) gives the impression that the “voices” did it in a mechanic way, accepted in a way by all.

In the following, one precise voice was identified in the ex-neighbour’s discourse. In this excerpt, the mother continues criticising people who kept silent about the affair, even though they knew about it (or got to know about it through the media), and deals with the case of her downstairs neighbour:
(9) Mother: y a même ma voisine en dessous qui m’a dit bon ben non moi je sais pas non je la connais pas alors qu’on en parle sur les journaux alors elle sait qui c’est mais les gens veulent pas se mouiller c’est tout.

Even my neighbour downstairs told me well me I don’t know I don’t know her while they talk about it in the newspapers so she knows who she is but people don’t want to get involved that’s it

She criticizes the neighbour who asserts that she didn’t know about the case, even if, according to the mother, she should have known because of the media frenzy. Through this voice, and the underlying criticism, the neighbour shows her support to the victim but at the same time puts forward a positive face (she is “fair”) in front of the interviewer and anthropologist – and the remote audience.

In the last excerpt of this section, contrary to the previous examples, the anthropologist inserts two indirect linguistic features to impersonate the neighbours’ voices and construct the image of the victim, as perceived by the latter: a deontic modality (“c’est elle qui doit être exclue” – “she is the one who must be excluded”) and a sentence containing the polysemic French pronoun (“c’est toujours elle qu’on rejette” – “she is always the one to be rejected”, for a discussion of the pronoun cf. Boutet 1986):

(10) Anthropologist: en dénonçant cet inceste elle a aussi dit publiquement les gens les voisins qui savaient n’ont rien fait donc elle a sali le village donc c’est elle qui doit être exclue en fait repoussée c’est toujours elle qui devient la coupable elle brise le silence

Through denouncing this case she has also said publicly that the people the neighbours who knew they didn’t do anything about it so she has dirtied the village so she is the one who must be excluded in fact pushed back she is always the one to be rejected she becomes the culprit she has broken the silence

The anthropologist clearly shows through this indirect impersonation that the victim’s confession has led to people’s anger and her rejection. By using these indirect features, she confirms the fact that the case is silenced, avoided, taboo and prone to rumours.

3. Use of one’s own voice

This section concludes the analysis and allows us to examine how the speakers use their own voice(s) in the programme and for what purposes. The following strategies were identified in the corpus: to define/position oneself for others, justify one’s position(s), play the spokesperson, and utter one’s anger/position oneself as a victim. Linguistically speaking, the following phenomena were used: self represented discourses (ex: I said to myself), generic forms to play the spokesperson and extreme case formulations (Pomerantz 1986).

In the first excerpt, the interviewer asks the victim to delineate the gist of the anthropologist’s study. The strategy and linguistic device used consist in opting for a “spokesperson” position for other incest victims through using a collective voice, we (“nous”):
Victim: pour moi elle donne un sens à la vie à tout le monde et pour moi ça fait du bien pour des gens comme nous c'est tout parce qu'on a besoin de savoir, savoir ce que les gens ils pensent ils racontent et pis pour nous elle s'occupe toujours de notre cas et elle nous a pas laissé tomber c'est tout moi ça me fait du bien

To me she gives meaning to life for everyone and it makes me feel good for people like us that's all we need because we need to know what people think, talk about and then for us she always takes care of our case and she didn’t forget us that’s it and it makes me feel good.

Though she does not answer the question here, note her use of an extreme case formulation (“she gives meaning to life for everyone”), “a way of legitimising claims” (Pomerantz 1986), i.e. the anthropologist’s considerable value.

In the following excerpt, which is a discussion between the ex-neighbour and the anthropologist, the latter tries to help the mother to answer the same question (“do you know what she is trying to find?”) by introducing her own past voice (“I have explained to you”) and thus defining her own identity for her (i.e. the way she wants it to be perceived probably by the neighbours):

(12) I: vous savez ce qu’elle recherche?
Mother: euh non...
Anthropologist: ben on est parti de l’affaire de L. je vous ai quand même expliqué que ce qui m’intéressait c’était euh
Mother: oui
Anthropologist: ce qu’ on disait d’elle ce qu’ on savait ce qu’ on savait pas
I: well do you know what she is trying to find?
M: euh... no
Anthropologist: well we started with L.’s affair I have explained to you that what I was interested in...
M: Yes
A: was what people said about her what they knew and didn’t know

This clearly shows the impact of the presence of the person the interviewer is interested in in the programme on the other actors.

The final excerpt contains what can be referred to as a self represented discourse, through which the speaker questions her selves and/or others. In what follows, the anthropologist reflects on her own identity as an anthropologist (“What is my job?”), because of the desperation and confusion she has sometimes experienced during her fieldwork:

(13) Anthropologist: et moi dans ma tête finalement je me dis quel est mon travail? Pourquoi passer tant d’heures à aller les voir? à aller chercher ce qu’ils savaient? ce qu’ils ne savaient pas ce qu’ils disaient se disaient pas?
And me in my head I say to myself what is my job? Why spend so many hours to go to meet them?
To try to find out about what they knew? What they didn’t know what they said they didn’t know?

Conclusion

This paper aimed at examining multi-positioning of the self and the other and its impact on identification in a radio programme about an anthropologist researching a case of
incest. The analysis demonstrated that multi-positioning did take place through very similar voicing devices across the speakers. As such, all the participants, and especially the ex-neighbours, resorted to the voice of Otherness to talk about the case. The anthropologist and the victim were the only speakers to use their own voices and show a degree of reflexivity. This can be explained by the fact that they were the main “actors” of the programme.

It is clear in the corpus that multi-positioning accompanies the social and contextual positions of the subjects and contributes mostly to their positive identification. The voices that were inserted by the speakers are far from having been chosen at random. In fact, they represent important discursive strategies. As a case of incest involves rumors, taboos, lies and silence, it seems normal that many of the voices used were mostly unidentified/iable, “invisible” and silenced in discourse.

We need to remember of course that the context and situation of the corpus is that of a radio programme and that the presence of Others (the journalist, the anthropologist, the “absent-present” audience, other witnesses...) through this media cannot but impact on the voices and thus the strategies used. Yet, these impacts cannot be pinpointed precisely by the analyst, as they are “buried” behind the speaker’s discourse. Multi-positioning is thus an unstable phenomenon composed of multiple ego-other-it-voices-context (space-time) elements. We are faced with an inconvenient when researching identity: dialogical discourse analysis is bound to be incomplete.

Yet, the following words of the French philosopher Henri Bergson published in his Creative Mind (1946: 145), are reassuring in the sense that if we are aware of this shortcoming and acknowledge it, then we can truly claim that we are working on process, changes, or movement: “We argue about movement as though it were made of immobilities and, when we look at it, it is with immobilities that we reconstitute it. Movement for us is a position, and then another position, and so on indefinitely”. As such, human communication is all about movement.

Bibliography