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From attitudes to commonplaces

- A discursive approach to attitude interviews

Jacob Thøgersen

Abstract

With a background in sociolinguistics, this paper presents the theoretical, methodological and epistemological issues the author was forced to negotiate in conducting the apparently simple task of investigating a few dozen people's attitudes towards the English influence on their own language. The paper discusses the fundamental epistemological shortcomings of different approaches to attitude research. Three different orders of analysis are attempted and reflected upon, a standardized quantitative analysis, a discourse analysis and a deconstructive, non-essentialist analysis. It is the author's firm belief that this critical examination of methods is on the one hand essential for academic approaches to attitude research, and on the other essential in informing the public – you and me – about the mechanisms of opinion polls which underlies so much modern political work.

In this respect, the papers "failure" to set up a new and improved approach to attitude research, and its content to point out the shortcomings of the current approaches, may not be a failure as much as a conscious plea to do away with the notion of a objective or neutral investigation of opinions.

Keywords: Attitude investigation, opinion polls, discourse analysis, alternative means of presenting analyses.

Introduction

The fundamental idea of an attitude investigation and opinion polls is brilliant. As one contemporary handbook in social psychology has it:

The essential feature of data collection using self-report measures is that questions about the participant's beliefs, attitudes, behaviour or whatever are put directly to the participant. His or her responses constitute self-report data. Self-report measurement is usually quicker, cheaper and easier to use than observational measurement. The researcher does not have to contrive a laboratory setting or find a natural setting in which to observe a behavioural response; furthermore, there is typically no need to train observers or to use recording equipment, for self-reports are usually recorded by the participant in the form of written responses. Finally [...] some of the variables that are most significant to social psychologists are not directly observable. (Manstead and Semin 2001)

In other words: If you can't observe what people are doing in a particular situation, try and ask them. Furthermore, even if you could observe them doing something, you could still try and ask them *why* to further your knowledge. This goes both for the improvement of your scientific knowledge and for the knowledge of your consumers' rationale - whether your product be a brand of soft drink or a political program. Opinion polling and attitude research is an economical way to investigate otherwise hard (or even impossible) to obtain information

In the political sphere, opinion polling and attitude research also started with a basically good idea. Usually the people's preferences are checked only at election times. Between elections only the particularly interested and resourceful will let their voice be heard. The opinion poll, with a randomly selected representative sample of the public, is a perfect method for continually checking the sentiments of the general public.

In academia, attitude research has been important to achieve a rough prediction of what people might do in the future, for example with respect to language and language change (Labov 1963 [1972]; Kristiansen 1992). This is also my starting point. I wish to predict the future of English in Denmark (with some level of certainty) through asking a sample of Danes about their experiences with and attitudes towards English.

It shouldn't be so hard, really – 1st order analysis

Ask a question in an opinion poll, and you will probably get an answer. Like this one:

What is your attitude towards linguistic purism (= the act of trying to keep the language 'pure' from outside influence)?

Very negative / ___/___/___/___/___/ very positive

In a pan Nordic comparison Danes come out as the least 'puristic' and the Icelanders and the Faroese as the most 'puristic'. In a Danish comparison the respondents with shorter education come out as more 'puristic' than the ones with longer education. These are stable, reproducible findings. However, they tell us nothing about *why* this is. It brings us nowhere closer to knowing what Danes being the 'least puristic' means. Which is why we take the self-reporting one step further and ask the respondents why they answer the way they do.

To that end we have at our disposal audio recordings of the filling in of the questionnaires and the interaction between a persistent interviewer and a respondent who is to a varying degree ready to elaborate on and argue for his answers.

Man skal jo ikke være reaktionær - man skal jo tage hvad man kan bruge af gode ting, ikke, [...] men man skal heller ikke bare... Altså jeg synes helt klart vores sprog det er noget vi skal passe på. [...] Det ville da være trist hvis det ophørte med at eksistere som sprog, hvis det bliver fuldstændigt forurennet... [11;78.53].

You shouldn't be reactionary. You should take what good thing you can use, you know [...] but you shouldn't just... You know, I definitely think our language is worth taking care of. [...] It would be sad if it stopped existing as a language, if it became completely polluted.

Whereas the respondent's quantitative, tick box, answer was uniform and positive, when we ask him to elaborate, we get an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, you should be open to new things, on the other you should preserve what you have. Note that it is not just this analyser who sees an opposition between the two statements. Their opposition is explicitly stated "but you shouldn't just...". Apparently then, the respondent holds a contradictory attitude... or two opposing attitudes maybe?

The 'cognitive dissonance' of contradictory attitudes (Festinger 1957 [1989]) is dissolved by some respondents in tying each strain of the attitude to its own object.

Det er igen det med det officielle eller det dagligdag[s]. Fordi jeg mener at jeg skal ikke prøve at holde et rent sprog, jeg skal prøve at hyle som de ulve jeg er blandt, så derfor mener jeg [ikke] at vi skal have et meget rent sprog [...]. Men tilsvarende så synes jeg at det skal være mere rent når det er officielt og når det er radioavisen og TV-avisen, og begynder det at blive alt for popsmart der, så rejser nakkehårene sig på mig [27;59.34].

Again it's the thing with the official and the mundane. Because I don't think I should try to maintain a pure language. I should just try and do like the Romans, so I don't think we should have a very pure language [...]. But I think that it should be more pure when it is official and the radio and TV news. If that gets too fancy the hairs in the back of my neck stand up.

So, on the one hand, everyday, mundane language should not be particularly 'pure', but the language of radio and TV should be. This however, doesn't so much solve the problem of divergent attitudes as it shifts it. We may have solved the problem of cognitive dissonance, but only in return for an attitude object which is no longer discrete and uniform across respondents, and between researcher and informant. In layman's terms we run the risk of comparing apples and oranges when we compare the answers of this respondent to the previous respondent. Are they in fact answering the same question or two different questions?

As if that wasn't enough, a fair proportion of, at least this author's, informants will introduce completely new and surprising definitions of the attitude objects. Here the respondent extrapolates rather freely on the description 'pure'.

Altså jeg synes det ville være positivt at man ligesom prøver på at bevare [et] sådan rimeligt rent sprog, fordi nogle gange synes jeg også at der er nogle formuleringer hvor man tager sig til hovedet. Altså hvad skal man sige [...] nogle beskidte ord, altså. Folk står og råber af hinanden "fuck you" på gaden, ikke. Altså der synes jeg der kommer nogle ting ind - ikke kun engelsk men også nogle andre ting, hvor jeg synes at det må der godt blive holdt lidt rent [42;33.30].

I think it would be positive to try and maintain a relatively pure language, because sometimes I think I hear phrases that make you hold your head [in anguish]. What can I say [...] dirty words, you know. People shouting at each other, "fuck you", in the street you know. Then some things come in, not just English things but other things too, where I think it could be kept a little pure.

It is quite understandable why a layman will consider 'dirty words' like "fuck you" something 'purism' should handle if it tries to keep a 'pure' language. The metaphors are all consistent with pollution and purification. It is not, however, how we as linguists would usually define the scope of linguistic purism – though perhaps the etymologically related puritanism...

In a 'normal' poll, i.e. without a qualitative check, you would be oblivious to these interpretative 'misses'. The qualitative check brings them to our attention. This is both good and bad. Bad because we must admit to be comparing (to stay in the metaphor) not only apples and oranges, but apples, oranges and pine trees and coffee cups. On the other hand it is good because it gives us valuable information about the layman's knowledge of language, so-called 'folk linguistic' (Preston 1993; Niedzelsky and Preston 1999).

The attitudes we have and the attitudes we think we have

At the risk of overstating the point, I believe one can give a schematic presentation of the attitudes we naïvely *think* people hold, as opposed to the more fragmented attitude complexes I *found* my respondents to hold.

Fig. 1: The attitudes we think they have

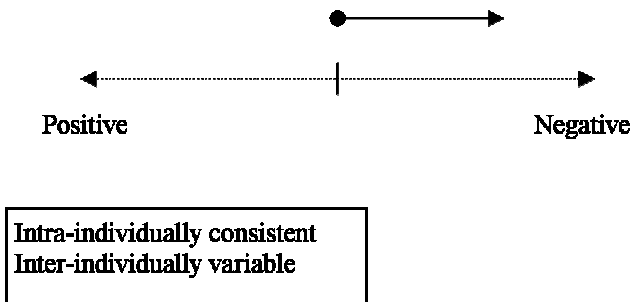


Fig. 1 should be read as follows: The black dot represents a discrete object of the attitude, such as language purism. We all, researchers and respondents, know the object and agree on its definition. To this object is associated an attitude. The attitude is represented by an arrow pointing in one direction from the object. I choose the term “vector” about the attitudes, because attitudes like vectors are constituted by a direction, “positive” or “negative”, and a length visualising the strength of the attitude, i.e. “very” positive or “relatively” positive, or in numbers “4” or “5”. The attitudes are believed to be intra-individually consistent. That is, a person is believed to hold relatively stable attitudes to a given object and not change his attitude from day to day or minute to minute. On the other hand, attitudes are believed to be inter-individually variable. That is, we believe different persons to hold different attitudes. Only in combining the *intra*-consistency with the *inter*-variability is it sensible to ask a respondent what *his* attitude is.

Fig. 2: The attitudes we find

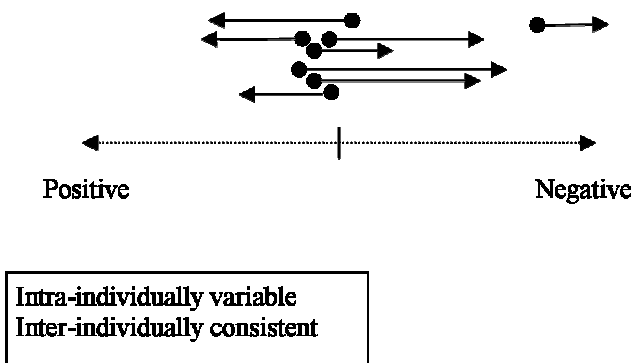


Fig. 2 is an attempt to visualise the attitudes I believe I actually found when looking for the ‘simple’ attitudes. We have seen how the object of the attitude is far from discrete. It is not even one thing. As we saw above, different respondent will define the object differently; the same respondent will even draw out different definitions of the object. It is debateable whether we should then think of the object as several objects each associated with its own attitude vector, or whether we should rather think of a singular but complex object associated with divergent attitudes. What the figure shows is how these different aspects (or objects) are associated with different vectors, some

pointing in a positive direction others in a negative direction. Most of the definitions lump together, and are what we could call legitimate aspects of the attitude object. A few are misfires, not without interest, but aspects that could reasonably be excluded from comparisons. The boundary between legitimate aspects and misfires of course is fuzzy. As a consequence of the object of the attitude being a complex entity, the attitude vectors are intra-individually variable. Or stated differently, a person's attitude towards linguistic purism will vary depending on which aspects of the complex object are brought out. On the other hand, the attitudes associated with the different aspects of the object of the attitude shows great inter-individual consistency. Respondents who bring out the same aspects will more often than not also share the attitudinal evaluation of the object. Varying 'attitudes' are often easier explained by varying aspects than by different evaluation of the same aspect.

I want to stress, however, that even though uniform attitudes associated with discrete objects may be rare to find, they are what researchers *as well as* respondents assume.

Ja, nu er jeg ambivalent igen fordi det er jo ikke bare enten eller... Jeg tror faktisk jeg vil have den i midten... [...] Man kan jo heller ikke bare isolere os i vores eget lille samfund, eftersom vi er i en stor verden. Og eftersom vi bliver påvirket alle steder fra, så ville det også virke unaturligt hvis man bare renser det hele. [Det] får det næsten til at føles som i stalintiden. Jeg tror vi alligevel vi skal have en lidt åben pande, ja.

Interviewer: Hvordan hænger det sammen med at du startede med at sige at der bliver brugt for mange engelske ord?

Jamen det er jo lige præcis her jeg står i et dilemma, for jeg synes nu pludselig at jeg har forandret mig inden jeg er færdig med spørgsmålene her. Fordi hvis jeg skal holde fast på det første så kan [krydset] ikke stå her, det er nemlig rigtigt. [...] Jamen jeg har måske tænkt lidt over - at mange af de ord vi har, altså det bare er der, det er blevet en naturlig del, for det er det jo blevet... Men derfor kan jeg jo godt stadig synes at nogle af tingene måske ikke burde være sprogligt så meget udefra. Men helt rense det kan man heller ikke, og det skal man heller ikke. [30;47.00].

Yes, now I am ambivalent again, because it isn't simply an either or. Actually I think I want the middle [...]. We can't just isolate ourselves in our own little community. It's a big world. And because we get influences from everywhere it would also be unnatural to cleanse it all. It almost makes things feel like the Stalin times. I think we need to keep an open mind, yes.

Interviewer: How does this relate to you starting out by saying that too many English words are being used?

Yes, that is precisely where I find my self in a dilemma, because now all of a sudden I feel I have changed before we have finished the questions. Because it I should stick to the first the X can't be here, that's right. [...] Well maybe I have given it a bit more thought – that many of the words we have, they have just become natural to us, they have you know. But in spite of that you can still feel that some things shouldn't be as linguistically foreign. But cleanse it completely you cannot either, and you shouldn't.

It may be as the respondent says that he has given the issue some more thought and has come to a more informed position. I still believe that it is fairer to say that he has picked out and highlighted different opposing aspects of the attitude. All of them are held with equal strength, but social norms – not least in an interview – demands that there be one *true* attitude. And hence other conflicting

attitudes must be drowned out. What we see in the excerpt is the respondent in effect constructing a legitimate uniform attitude in honour of the interview and interviewer.

I feel forced to put the quest for uniform attitudes to rest as more of an effect of the interview setting than as a loyal description of the respondents' inner life. But how, then, can we proceed? How can we investigate attitudes more satisfyingly when simple, standardized check box investigation seems to lead only to confusion? What I have attempted are a couple of more thoroughly qualitative approaches. Because these are analyses based on critical examination of the 1st order quantitative analysis, I shall call these analyses the 2nd order analysis.

2nd order analyses – in search of commonplaces

The 2nd order analyses form an attempt to address the shortcomings of the standardized analysis. We saw above that attitudes can hardly be conceptualised as uniform entities. Respondents do not hold one stable attitude towards any given object. They hold a range of attitudes to a range of different aspects of the object. Which attitude they will subscribe to at any given moment largely depends on which aspects are drawn out at this particular moment. If attitudes, then, are fluid, what can we take to be (relatively) solid? This is the question the 2nd order analyses try to answer.

The 2nd order analyses are *discursive*. But they are discursive in different ways, micro vs. macro, to come to terms with two relatively stable issues in attitude presentation which I believe to have found. On the one hand attitudes in (my) interviews are presented in relatively uniform ways. There are a set of very common interactional features which respondents use when they are asked to present (or defend) their attitudes. On the other hand, the respondents do not present (or construct) their attitudes in a vacuum. They share certain background social knowledge about language, language policy etc. This *folk knowledge* is used to negotiate further beliefs, which again are used to support attitudes. The folk knowledge or, if you will, the *topoi* may vary greatly from "real" (i.e. academic) linguistic knowledge; but cannot a priori be written off as less consistent and certainly not as less significant than academic linguistic knowledge.

"The study of folk beliefs about language is one of the ethnographies of a culture. In ethnobotany one wants to learn (at least) a culture's beliefs about the naming of, relationships among, and uses for plants. Ethnolinguistics should do the same" (Niedzelsky and Preston 1999).

As with all other cultural analyses, asking whether the ethno-knowledge is 'true', meaning "does it match our academic knowledge?", simply misses the point of the analysis. A certain amount of value relativism is inevitable. One must try to analyse the cultural knowledge on its own terms, and not give untimely precedence to one's own knowledge.

I will present two different 2nd order analyses. The first deals with the way attitudes are presented in interviews, the *form* or the *how's* of attitudes as it were. The other deals with the cultural knowledge or commonplaces on which the attitudes are argued, the *content* or the *what's* of attitudes. Both of them, as I said, are discursive, but they are discursive in different senses of that word. The first of the two draws heavily on the Conversation Analysis tradition of micro discourse analysis (Sacks, Schegloff et al. 1974; Pomerantz 1986; Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998), and more specifically on the British Discursive Psychology tradition (Billig 1987; Potter and Wetherell 1987; Edwards and Potter 1992; Wetherell and Potter 1992; Potter 1998). The second of the two is closely connected to macro analysis of discourse in the vein of Michel Foucault (Foucault 1966 [1991]; Foucault 1972 [2002]) and Norman Fairclough (Fairclough 1992).

'Form' analysis

We saw above that uniform attitudes are if not a myth then at least a rarity. The same however goes for attitude expressions which are of the simple form "I prefer X", "I dislike Y" etc. In one interview a respondent was asked the question:

Q: Announcers in radio and TV broadcast do not always adhere to the same norms for correct language. What do you think about the use of ordinary everyday language as opposed to 'standard Danish' in the programmes?

When confronted with the task of presenting his attitude in a simple tick-box reply, his answer looked like this:

A: I prefer everyday language.

When, however, a minute later he was asked to elaborate on his apparently uniform answer, the argument looked like this:

- 1 Int: hvad er det du godt kan lide ve:d dagligsprog (.) eller af dagligsprog (0.4) i:: tv og radio
2 Resp: >øh hvad jeg kan godt lide det er< at man øh:: (0.4) kalder en spade for en spade (1.2) siger
3 det lige ud ad landevejen så man forstår (0.4) uden alle de der krummelurer på (.) hvor man
4 skal begynde at tænke og tolke på >havde jeg nær sagt hvad< det er der foregår
5 Int: mm
6 (2.8)
7 Resp: >ikke at ma- jeg mener at man skal for↓fladige sproget slet ikke< (..) det er ikke det jeg
8 mener.
9 Int: nej
10 (2.5)
11 Resp: så det er måske i grund- (0.4) bedre rigsdansk jeg vil have (.) når det kommer til stykket (..)
12 pø nu er jeg lige pludselig i tvivl ikke (...) [det er] jeg faktisk
13 Int: [()]
14 (0.5)
15 Int: øh jeg ved ikke helst- (.) øh helt selv hvad det spørgsmål egentlig betyder (..) for [de:r-]
16 Resp: [f-
17 rigs]dansk det er jo det man taler (.) i det pæ:ne København ikke altså (...) ↓Århus
18 København de store byer ikke=
19 Int: =mm
20 (0.6)
21 Resp: det er vel det man forstår ved det (2.8) for de de:r (0.4) bondske (.) Nørrebro >nu er jeg jo
22 lidt grov nok< .hh men øh (.) Nørrebroske ikke og det det synes je:g (.) d- det kan godt være
23 lidt (0.6) lidt tungt at forstå >at h- eller ikke forstå at høre<
24 Int: mm
25 (1.2)
26 Resp: >men jeg mener heller ikke man skal gå hen at blive affekteret< (1.1) det er jo heller ikke
27 det jeg mener
28 Int: nej
29 Resp: så hvad mener jeg egentlig
30 Int: æhh hæh hæh (.) .hh
31 Resp: °ja det er jo et godt spørgsmål jo°

32 (1.4)
 33 Resp: .hh nej jeg tror >godt v- jeg vil have< v- folk taler lige ud ad landevejen s- in- >mediesprog
 34 der hvor de kommer fra<
 35 (0.8)
 36 Int: også selv om de kommer fra Nørrebro
 37 Resp: også selv om de kommer fra Nørrebro også selv om de kommer fra: (0.4) øh Vrå ovre i
 38 Jylland >eller sådan nogle steder< h så man får de der dialekter med jo (.) det vil jeg godt
 39 have. [30;5.11]

Int: what is it that you like about everyday language in radio and TV?

Resp: what I like is that you call things by their proper name, tell it like it is without too much ornamentation where you have to think and interpret what happens.

Int: mm

Resp: not that I think you should vulgarize the language, not at all. That's not what I mean.

Int: no

Resp: so maybe it is better standard Danish I want when it comes down to it. Now I am in doubt all of a sudden. I am in doubt actually.

Int: I don't exactly know what this question means because ther-

Resp: standard Danish, that is what is spoken in the nice parts of Copenhagen you know, Århus, Copenhagen, the big cities.

Int: mm

Resp: I guess that is what is meant by it, because that boorish Nørrebro, I know I am a little rude now, but Nørrebro'ish I think that can be a little difficult to understand, or not understand really, but to listen to.

Int: mm

Resp: but I don't think one should be affected, that is not what I mean either.

Int: no

Resp: so what do I mean really?

Int: ehh heh heh

Resp: that's a good question

Resp: no I think I want people to simply tell it like it is in media language, like where they're from.

Int: even if they come from Nørrebro

Resp: even if they come from Nørrebro and even if they come from Vrå in Jylland or places like that, so you get those dialects. That is what I want.

The first thing I wish to point out is the apparent paradox that a respondent who has already once revealed his attitude towards 'everyday language' in a simple and uniform way, can still produce this complex monologous discussion about the same issue. If stable attitudes were held and simply reported in interviews, surely this kind of conflicting attitudes is not what would be expected.

More to the point of the form analysis, the excerpt illustrates three features of the presentation of an attitude which I find again and again in the interviews. I will call these three *pragmaticalization*, *neutralization* and *positioning*.

Pragmaticalization – getting a handle on the issue

An immediate problem for the respondents when faced with the questions of the interviewer is, as I think is illustrated by the excerpts, that they haven't really given these language policy issues much thought. To be sure, they haven't given them much thought in the decontextualized terms which academic linguistics use. They haven't built a general stance to the issues which they can readily represent and defend. What they do have is some general and well established norms for what it is to be a good person. *Pragmaticalization*, as I see it, is about matching the interviewer's and the questionnaire's decontextualized questions with the pragmatic everyday notions of good and bad, reasonable and ridiculous (cf. Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1973 [1999]) for a comparable view).

The tool for doing pragmaticalization which I want to point to is the use of commonplaces, cf. (Billig 1987). In the excerpt we saw several uses of commonplaces. For example in line 2 to "kalde en spade for en spade" 'call thing by their proper name', "sige det lige ud ad landevejen", 'tell it like it is', in line 7 "man skal ikke forfladige sproget", 'you shouldn't vulgarize the language' and in line 26 "man skal ikke gå hen og blive affekteret", 'you shouldn't be affected'. What makes a commonplace is its tautological nature. Although each of the respondent's uses of a commonplace seems to give new information about him, none of them on a propositional level do. "I think you should call things by their proper name, but I don't think you should vulgarize the language", although they are on the face of it strong normative claims, in reality say nothing that anyone will disagree on. No one ever will propose that "you shouldn't call a thing by its proper name" or that "I think you should vulgarize the language". It is exactly this tautological nature of the commonplace which makes it so useful. It is a pre-packaged combination with verbal expression and value assessment – and it is irreproachable. This is not to say that you couldn't oppose the statement of a commonplace. You could, and the respondent does. But he does not do it by challenging the commonplace head on, but by facing it with another commonplace with the opposite outcome. The effect of pragmaticalization through commonplaces is that the respondent's way to negotiate his own attitude isn't, as we might have otherwise believed, to sit back and feel deep in his soul what he really thinks about the issue he is faced with. Settling on an attitude is rather deciding which commonplaces best fit the issue at hand.

As a nice point, notice how the thing that the respondent decides upon in the end of the excerpt, his conclusion, is not directly related to the question he was posed. What he decides upon is one of the commonplaces which he presented himself, viz. that you should "simply say it like it is in the language of where you are from". To schematize: We start with a question posed decontextualized, all encompassing. In order to be something the respondent can form an opinion towards, it is next pragmaticalized by being matched with a number of (conflicting) commonplaces. In the end, as the conclusion, the respondent settles for one of the commonplaces as more appropriate than the opposing – and this is noted as his true attitude. Only in the rare occasion do the respondent return to the decontextualized sphere and express his attitude in the format given by the question. Far more common is it to stay in the contextualized, and more reserved, sphere. The reservations which are inevitably a consequence of the respondent reformulating the question and answering only his own question, brings us to the next feature of attitude formatting, *neutralization*.

Neutralization – presenting an attitude as if it isn't an attitude

By neutralization I mean the very common practice that respondents will present their attitude as if it is not an attitude at all but simply the only reasonable stance on the matter; a choice presented as a non-choice. This is theoretically interesting. We tend to assume attitude evaluations to be exclusive but equivalent. We assume that our attitudes are (more or less informed) choices between like

evaluations in which no choice is inherently better. Attitudes in other words, we assume to be a matter of individual preference not of rational justification.

Through neutralization, however, attitude constructions are not a choice between equals. It is an argument that one's own choice is neutral, considered and without self interest, whereas the choices of the others' are biased, rash and often governed by self interest. More than anything, what distinguishes own choices from that of the others', is that one's own stance is presented as moderate, whereas that of the others' is presented as fundamentalist and dogmatic. This is apparent even on the linguistic surface where opposing views are often presented with extreme case formulations (Pomerantz 1986) such as 'all', 'always', 'completely', whereas own views are presented with 'softeners' (Edwards 2000) such as 'some', 'sometimes', 'a little'.

One further strategy in presenting one's own view as neutral is to avoid presenting it in positive terms. We have seen how opposing views are presented as somehow extreme and (through pragmaticalization) in commonplaces which no one can reasonably dispute. A way to 'present an attitude as though it is no attitude' is then to simply reject an extreme version of others' views without explicating one's own. In rhetorical terms this is what is known as arguing against a straw man.

In the excerpt above I pointed out a number of commonplaces. Notice how several of these are presented to be rejected not to be confirmed, i.e. with a neutralization feature. In line 7 for example we get 'I don't think you should vulgarize the language' and in line 26 'I don't think one should get affected'. None of these are very strong claims. As we know commonplaces are picked out exactly *because* no one will disagree with them. No one will ever claim that one should vulgarize language or be affected, and thus presenting them to reject them does not involve very high investment. This is not to say that no 'attitude work' is being done. Every competent interlocutor will be able to extrapolate from the commonplaces to a more general language attitude, viz. on the one hand one of conservatism on the other one of liberalism. The two different language attitudes (and their opposition) are very clearly present in the interaction. But through neutralization they are never explicitly championed in a way that the respondent can be held responsible for them.

This excerpt is not heavy with the uses of 'extreme case formulations' and 'softeners', but they are there. See line 3 "all of that ornamentation" for an example of an extreme case formulation. And see line 23 "a little hard to understand or [...] to listen to". The extreme case formulation is used to make the thing the respondent opposes not so much ornamentation per se, but overmuch ornamentation. The softener is used to present the respondent as sociable. His description of 'nørrebrosk' is not so much antagonistic and complaining as it is merely pointing to a minor nuisance.

Positioning – attitudes and social categories

The third feature I want to draw attention to is *positioning*. I have already hinted at this by showing how respondent and interviewer are highly aware of the social values attached to the attitudes the respondent is presenting. Therefore positioning is on the one hand a reason for neutralization (you neutralize so as not to be ascribed certain positions), and on the other positioning is done through neutralization (through neutralization you position yourself as a reasonable, moderate, considered etc. person).

By using the term *positioning* I draw on the constructivist (social) psychology tradition which interpret identity as the outcome of interactional negotiations rather than inner qualities (Davies and Harré 1990; Howie and Peters 1996; Wetherell 1998). Positioning is the dynamic identity construction which happens through identity categories being introduced and

evaluated as things the interlocutors *are* or *are not*. Every utterance is produced with orientation to the picture it paints of the speaker – for the interlocutor as well as for the speaker him or herself.

Again this is interesting from a theoretical perspective. We may naïvely think that a survey or an attitude investigation is an event where social value plays a very little role. The respondent is confronted with a question, he searches his feelings for an attitude and presents his answer. Questions are always formulated value neutral without a social bias in one direction or the other. In fact it is a fundamental of interviewing that interviewers should never evaluate their questions or the respondents answers. In an attitude interview no attitudes are tabooed. The objects respondents are asked to present their opinions towards are in other words kept socially neutral in formulations as well as in feedback to responses. It is striking, then, how much work respondents put into re-socializing the neutralized questions. And further it is striking how often a question about personal attitude is answered with reference to social categories (“I am (not) an X”) instead of discrete attitude statements (“I do (not) believe Y”). In the excerpt we do not see any direct use of the format (“I am (not) an X”). On the other hand I believe we see clear traces of the respondent navigating the social value of several potential answers. The choice of words reveals that social identities are what is at stake rather than value neutral attitude alternatives. Most clearly in line 26 “you shouldn’t be affected” and in line 33 “I want people to simply tell it like it is” as well as the definition of standard Danish being that it is “the language spoken in the nice parts of Århus and Copenhagen” in line 17. In all of these examples notice that what is stated is social norms and social definitions – rules about how people should act as well categorising people. Standard Danish could be defined without direct reference to its speakers (e.g. “non-regionally marked Danish” or even “the most correct/beautiful/original Danish”). By calling on the stereotypical users of standard Danish, any statement about standard Danish is implicitly a statement about other social groups. Similarly, norms regarding the use of language in the media could easily be restricted to terms of e.g. “comprehension”. Instead we find normative and generalizable rules of conduct. “One shouldn’t be affected”, “one should simply tell it like it is”, i.e. “one shouldn’t be a snob”. This rule of conduct is presented in direct opposition to another rule of conduct, viz. “you shouldn’t vandalize the language” – a rule the respondent also champions. Instead of attempting to analyze this discrepancy narrowly with reference only to the respondent’s attitude towards language in the media, I believe it is far more fruitful to broaden the analysis to include the more general social identities brought into play. In this instance they can tentatively be thought of as ‘the liberal’ (“not be affected”, “tell it like it is”) vs. ‘the conservative’ (“not vulgarize the language”).

What we have then is a respondent constructing a local identity by orienting to two different social positions. After first drawing up a picture of the two positions, he settles for one of them. But, mind you, first after discussing the merits of the opposing view – and therefore presenting his liberal view as a *considered* liberal view.

‘Content’ analysis

When presenting or constructing their attitudes through the devices just shown, the respondents do not start from scratch. They have a certain cultural knowledge about language which they assume they share with their interlocutor, and which they can therefore draw upon in arguing their stance. In this section I want to show some of the most prominent and stable of this knowledge, i.e. basic pieces of knowledge which are used again and again as support for making a claim; for as we saw, presenting an attitude is more a matter of defining a place in which what one says is neutral and self-evident, than about boldly proclaiming an inner state.

In arguing an attitude, two different levels of discourse are involved. One is the local, specific to the question in general and often brought about by the preceding talk. These have

already been touched upon above when e.g. one respondent in effect locally defines ‘purism’ as cleansing the language of swear words. These local definitions of key terms are very significant for the understanding of the outcome of the attitude investigation; as a critical investigation of the interactive production of “attitudes”. But they are not consistent enough for us to claim that they are solid topoi in the discussion of English in Denmark. On the other hand, the global discourses are of that nature, I will propose. They are standard claims which many respondents adhere to when they argue any given stance on a question. And as a further claim to their global presence, they are almost always used as presupposed background knowledge, and hardly ever explicitly claimed and discussed. This leads me to suspect that they are discourses which the respondents take it for granted that they share with the interviewer, and as such that they form a common cultural knowledge.

I will discuss only a few of the most common of the global discourses. One is related to the position of English as an international language vis-à-vis other languages internationally. One is related to the symbolic use of English as a foreign language in Denmark. And finally one is not directly related to English at all, but it appears rather to be a common feature of attitude investigations.

English as the default language of the world

In one question the respondents are asked to estimate the relative ‘importance’ of a number of international languages: Arabic, English, French, German, Russian, and Spanish. It will come as no big surprise that Danes, with an outlook from the ‘western world’, uniformly estimate English’ position as maximal, supporting their claims with arguments along the line of this:

Uanset hvor du tager [hen] i verden, der taler du engelsk - så er der altid nogle der kan - gøre et eller andet. Og så kan du komme videre [30;17.05].

No matter where you go in the World, if you speak English there is always someone who can help you, and then you can move on.

The mean ranking of the other languages is in itself interesting to analyze as an indication of the respondents folk knowledge. Of more immediate interest, however, is that irrespectively of whether a respondent estimates a language as ‘important’ or ‘unimportant’ they arrive at their estimation using the same algorithm: 1) Is the language a ‘big’ language? 2) Can the speakers of the language be assumed to speak English? If the answer to the first question is yes and the answer to the second is no, then the language may be an important one. If the speakers of the language, however, are deemed to speak English, then the language is relatively less important. So in arguing for the importance of Arabic we get on the one hand:

Arabisk, det spiller en meget stor rolle som internationalt sprog. [...] Der bor mange mennesker i den arabiske verden, og jeg tror det de færreste af dem der er rigtigt gode til engelsk [19;11.20].

Arabic plays a very large role as an international language. A lot of people live in the Arabic World, and I believe few of them are really good at English

And on the other:

Alle de arabiske lande jeg har været i, der snakker de fantastisk godt engelsk. Så jeg vil sige at den - kommer ikke til at – spille... De er jo alle sammen engelske stater så... [25;17.18].

In all the Arabic countries I've been to, they speak English really well. So Arabic won't play a very large role. They are all British states [presumably: 'previous colonies'].

The same arguments as I said are used when estimating the importance of the other languages in the list. And the same basic reasoning, *mutatis mutandis*, is used when arguing about which languages are most important to speak as foreign languages, which language should be taught in school etc. I believe that this is very illustrative of the unquestioned importance the Danish respondents ascribe to English. More illustrative even than the maximal mean score they awarded English on a scale of importance.

English as a sign of modernity, internationality and being interesting

In several different questions respondents are required to estimate the relative English influence in a number of different language, different language domains etc. Again I will only in passing touch upon the quantitative scores, and instead focus on the arguments respondents use to arrive at their estimate. Like for the estimation of languages' international importance, the amount of English influence is estimated quite indirectly.

It is common knowledge (although *how* common may be questionable as well as the factual validity of the common knowledge) that among the Nordic speech communities Denmark is one of the, if not *the*, society most influenced by English. On the opposite, Iceland is known to be very little influenced by English. Of Norway and Sweden, the most immediate neighbours of the Danish respondents, Norway is considered to have less English influence than Sweden and Denmark. This view has some but not full support among the respondents in this investigation. Looking at how the respondents come to their estimation of e.g. the amount of English influence in Sweden compared with Norway is noteworthy. Let us compare one respondent who arrives at the judgment that Swedes have more English influence than Norway

Svenskerne er også meget internationale i forhold til - nordmændene - i al almindelighed, synes jeg. De har jo de der store konglomerater -- kæmpestore firmaer over hele banden, og de - snakker jo alle sammen engelsk [32;44.00].

The Swedes are very international compared to the Norwegians, generally, I think. They have these giant companies, and there everyone speaks English

It is worth a discussion in itself to see how the respondent arrives at the amount of "English in Swedish" (which is the wording in the question) through estimating the use of English as a foreign language in Swedish companies. This phenomenon, which is very common, and its consequences for the attitude investigation I will leave aside for now. Instead notice how the respondent arrives at his estimation of the amount of English, by estimating how *international* the two populations are. In other words English (influence) is equated with internationality and modernity; the more modern, the more English influence. And exactly the same line of reasoning is used by respondents who arrive at the opposite evaluation of Sweden and Norway:

De [svenskerne] er ikke så internationale - i den retning. [...] de vil have det mere i svensk oversættelse [25;49.35].

They [the Swedes] are not as international, they want it in Swedish translation

The opposite of ‘modernity’ is sometimes stated, most often as either ‘conservatism’ or ‘nationalism’. Here is an example of the first.

Jeg tror de [svenskerne] er lidt mere - konservative sådan i den retning. [...] Jeg tror de vil - gøre det for at holde fast i deres – svenske [26;45.25].

I think they [the Swedes] are a little more conservative. I think they want to stick with their Swedish

So the respondents agree on equating English with ‘modernity’ in contrast with ‘conservatism’. They do not agree on whether Swedes are modern or conservative, but that is beside the point when out interest is in topoi surrounding English.

Completely similar lines of reasoning are used when the respondents are required to estimate the amount of English in different language domains. For example the respondents are asked to judge the amount of loan words in the “church”¹.

Kirken - der er ikke et eneste. (15 sek.) Altså det er så konservativt som det næsten kan være, synes jeg [26;30.37].

The church, not a single one. [15 sec.]It is as conservative as can be, I think

Kirke - ingen tror jeg fordi [...] den er så gammel og så forankret [1;27.20].

The Church, none I think. It is so old and rooted in the past

Det må være meget lavt - for jeg synes de snakker meget kedeligt - næsten for kedeligt mange af præsterne [46;18.30].

It must be very few, because I think they speak very boringly, almost too boringly, many of the priests.

Again, the way respondents arrive at their estimation of the number of loanwords, is not, as one might naïvely believe, through listing a number of words and estimating how many of them are English. It is rather through estimating the ‘image’ of the church and then using the equation “modern = much English, conservative/old fashioned/boring = little English”.

¹ Denmark has a Lutheran state church. More than 80 % of the population are members of the state church, so when speaking about ‘the church’, it can be taken as synonymous with this church.

The wish for 'status quo'

The third discourse I wish to mention is the often occurring matter-of-fact claim to status quo. It is not very remarkable that respondents will use state-of-affairs as starting point for an attitude claim, and it is of course not specifically relevant to the attitudes towards English. It is however a very significant feature of the attitude interview; on the one hand because it acts (again) to minimize the respondent's stake in the presentation of an attitude – he merely establishes a fact, on the other because common knowledge as well as presuppositions in the interview questions thus get solidified. Presuppositions get taken for respondents' attitudes and wishes, whereas what they are framed as in the interview are merely expressions of states-of-affair.

In one question the respondents are asked to give their general opinion about the amount of English in Danish. Here are two respondents who answer opposite each other, one saying that there are too many English loan words, the other saying that there is not. Notice how both of them support their claim by appealing to the state of affairs, to leaving things the way they are.

Jeg [er] i virkeligheden fortaler for - at man skal prøve at bibevare det danske ikke, og [...] opfinde nye ord til det ikke. Men jeg vil slet ikke sige mig selv undtaget, for jeg bruger desværre alt for mange engelske udtryk [2;4.35].

I'm in favor of us maintaining the Danish and trying to invent new words for it, but I won't deny using far too many English words myself.

Det er også lidt ud fra filosofien at jeg ikke mener at vi behøver at lave nogle – opfinde nogle ord som virker fuldstændigt - malplacerede når – når andre bruger de her [engelske] ord [25;5.54].

I don't think we need to invent words which seem completely out of place when others use these [English] words

The two then agree that it is best to maintain things the way they are. Their difference is in scope. The first of the two has his scope on the Danish language – what should be kept the way it is, is the Danish language with all its (Danish) words. The other has his scope on individual words. The objects and concepts we import come with a certain label, if this label is English, we should keep that label, and thus keep things the way they are.

To iterate, from a theoretical point of view it is interesting that respondents draw upon a discourse which is as uncontroversial as it can possibly be – “let's leave things the way they are” – and that this statement in the logic of the attitude investigation then gets transformed into the respondents' attitudes about too many or not too many English loanwords. The respondents seem to try to avoid saying anything too noteworthy – which turns into them being ascribed strong positive or negative feelings. From a discourse analysis perspective it is remarkable that one of the, if not *the*, most prominent argument in favour of any attitude claim, is exactly this value neutral “let's keep things the way they are”. And most remarkable of course is that it can be used in support of both directions in just about every matter at hand. Here to support purism and to support *laissez faire*'ism, but similarly in a lot of other questions. Finally from the point of view of the validity of an attitude investigation, it is significant that what respondents seem to share, is not their inner emotions, but rather their most qualified guess at how things already are. What we have here, then, is the public discourse reproducing itself. If public discourse has it that, say, Danish has a *laissez faire* policy towards English loanwords, this *laissez faire*'ism gets registered as the most common

attitude, which solidifies the policy etc. Not to say that no respondent breaks the cycle and actually do pronounce a strong opinion backed by external support – it is just very infrequent compared with the claims to status quo.

This ends the last of the 2nd order analyses. To recapitulate where we have come so far: We started out by taking the attitude investigation at face value, what I called the 1st order analysis. But when we dug just a little into the respondents reasons for answering the way they do, we found that the questions the respondents answered was not always the ones researchers thought they would answer. It turns out that meaning is not all that discrete and objective. In fact meaning is highly dependent on co- and context, it is even susceptible to misunderstandings between interlocutors. Being linguists we already know this, it just seems we left this knowledge aside when we entered the interview. The variable meaning is a crucial blow to all claims to comparability across interviews, and thus to the standardized attitude investigation. We saw clearly that respondents did not answer the same question, and thus comparing their answers seem dubious.

This fact led to the 2nd order analysis. If we cannot assume that respondents understand questions in like ways, then let us instead analyze the common and comparable ways in which they answer. From this dictum, two different analyses were conducted. One dealt with the rhetorical *form* of attitude statements, the other dealt with the rhetorical *content* of it, the building blocks of the attitude answers.

The critical reader should be suspicious now. Doesn't it seem like we have changed one bold essentialism for another? We found that respondents did not understand what the interviewer meant. How then can we assume that the interview cum analyst unproblematically can pick out and organize discourses? What is his special power that lets him shortcut the problems he has just so painstakingly pointed out? This reflexive take on the attitude investigation comprises the 3rd and last order in the analysis.

Anti-essentialist readings – 3rd order analysis

Derrida (Derrida 1967 [1997]) pointed out that language is not *transcendental*, it is not positioned outside the world, pointing at it. It is immanent, itself a part of the world. Meaning in language is therefore never anchored in an exterior reality. Language instead works as a chain of signs, with one sign referring to another sign, which refers to another sign etc. In the abstract, this theory may be hard to manage. But I believe it is essentially the same insight the interviewer and respondent are working their way to in interactions like this:

Q: What is your attitude towards linguistic purism (= the act of trying to keep the language 'pure' from outside influence)?

Resp.: *Det kommer meget an på ud fra hvilket synspunkt. Hvis det er ud fra sådan en nationalistisk₁ synsvinkel så synes jeg nok det er meget negativt, ikke.*

Interv.: *Mm - og hvis det er ud fra en demokratisk₂?*

Resp.: *Så synes jeg det er noget andet. Det er nok det der ligger i det. Ja, hvis det er et ønske om at flest muligt skal inddrages₂, så synes jeg det er fint, hvis det er ud fra nogle forestillinger om noget ægte særegent dansk som man skal beskytte₁, så får jeg lidt kvalme af det, ikke. Ja det er simpelthen nok det.*

Interv.: *Men er det ikke svært at se forskel?.*

Resp.: *Uhyre svært. Det [er] derfor det er så svært at forholde sig til de her ting, ikke, og man bliver så vaskende i det altså [28:83.00].*

Resp.: It depends very much on the view point. If it is seen from a nationalistic₁ point of view, I guess I think it is very negative.

Interv.: Mm –and if it is from a democratic₂?

Resp.: Then I believe it is something else. That is probably what is in it. Yes, if it is from a wish to involve as many as possible₂, I think it is fine, but if it is from some notion of something uniquely Danish which must be protected₁, it makes me sick, you know. I guess that is probably it.

Interv.: But isn't it hard to tell the difference?

Resp.: Incredibly hard. That is why it is so hard to relate to these things and one gets so ambivalent.

I have indexed the references to purism to highlight the two opposing definitions each associated with its own attitude. What I want to show with this excerpt is how the respondent does not tie his attitude to the linguistic sign he is presented with, but rather introduces new signs, “democracy” and “nationalism”, which he then negotiates. In other words, “purism” is inscribed meaning not in what it refers to in a language external world – what it means – but through the other signs that it is related to. It should be needless to say that this is not unique to “purism”, “nationalism” could get exactly the same treatment, e.g. separating it in “all citizens are equal” and “we are better than all others”.

To Derrida, the consequence of his analysis seems to be that since words only refer to words, we can no longer meaningfully discuss meaning through words – which, ironically, he uses words to say. In other words, we can deconstruct ‘meaningful’ expressions, but we cannot build new. We are at a, not very satisfying, semantic dead end. Enter Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze and Parnet 1977 [1987]; Deleuze 2004). Deleuze is hard to get a grip on, but it seems to me that he basically accepts Derrida’s analysis, that language is not transcendental. But instead of taking the consequence that nothing meaningful can be said with a non-transcendental language, his conclusion is that a lot of meaningful reality can be build using language. In other words, instead of trying to describe reality with words, we should rather try and construct a reality that brings us closer to some understanding. Language to Deleuze is in the original sense *poetic*, ‘constructive’. Now Deleuze’ rejection to attempt to describe in language, i.e. denying to use language the way we are used to using language, often makes it hard to pin down what it is he is trying to say. To understand Deleuze’ project, I therefore turn to one of his commentators:

When we think about problems, we tend to think about them in terms of solutions. Problems, it seems to us, seek solutions. Not only do they seek solutions, each problem seek a unique solution, or at least a small set of them. It is as though a problem were merely a particular lack or fault that a solution will fill or rectify. That is how we were taught to think of problems at school. And that is why schools have so many tests. [...]
But we do not need to approach things this way. Instead of seeing these as problems that seek a particular solution, we might see them as opening up fields of discussion, in which there are many possible solutions, each of which captures something, but not everything, put before us by the problem. (May 2005)

Applying this dictum to attitude investigations presents some problems but also opens up some new avenues to investigate. One should maybe not try to determine *what* Danes attitudes are towards English; pose a question only to find the solution, in May’s words. Of course we have already criticized this attempt on empirical grounds, but still. Further more, after rejecting giving the simple

answer, maybe we should not try to simply rephrase the question in order to give a more appropriate answer. That in a sense was what I did with the 2nd order analyses. I rejected the quantitative, uniform analysis only to introduce a uniform qualitative analysis. Perhaps a more valid and honest analysis is exactly the analysis which does *not* try to give uniform, memorable conclusions, but instead try to maintain the multi-faceted, self-contradictory discussions? Of course, this may be a dead end. In fact we often do pose questions because we want a tangible answer. But do let's just for a moment attempt to follow Deleuze'/May's dictum. How would one go about doing this?

The text which isn't a text

In a way we have taken a detour through philosophy to arrive closer to home, viz. deep in a problem anthropology has always been fighting. "How can we describe 'the other' as just as complex, just as contradictory as we are ourselves?". Clifford & Marcus (Clifford and Marcus 1986) edited a classic work that tries to come to terms with just this problem. They write in their introduction:

For [Edward] Said, the Orient is "textualized"; its multiple, divergent stories and existential predicaments are coherently woven as a body of signs susceptible of virtuoso reading. This Orient, occulted and fragile, is brought lovingly to light, salvaged in the work of the outside scholar. The effect of domination [...] is that they confer on the other a discrete identity, while also providing the knowing observer with a standpoint from which to see without being seen, to read without interruption. (Clifford and Marcus 1986)

The problem as it seems arises from different points of view. Not only from a philosophical and from an empirical point of view, but here also from a political point of view is it objectionable to attempt to pigeonhole other peoples' attitudes, opinions, experiences, world view etc. into discrete categories that *we* believe to be sensible. If we respect the people we investigate as equals, we should give them the right to define their own rationality, shouldn't we? Indeed, the very attempt to "describe" others, i.e. make them object of a description which we hold sole responsibility for and power over is objectionable. Clifford and Marcus describe an early (perhaps unwilling) attempt to break the chains of the all-powerful writer:

*James Walker is widely known for his classic monograph *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota* (1917) [...]. But our reading of it must now be complemented – and altered – by an extraordinary glimpse of its "makings". Three titles have now appeared [...] The first (*Lakota Belief and Ritual*) is a collage of notes, interviews, texts, and essay fragments written or spoken by Walker and numerous Oglala collaborators. This volume lists more than thirty "authorities", and whenever possible each contribution is marked with the name of its enunciator, writer, or transcriber. These individuals are not ethnographic "informants". *Lakota Belief* is a collaborative work of documentation, edited in a manner that gives equal rhetorical weight to diverse renditions of tradition. Walker's own descriptions and glosses are fragments among fragments. (Clifford and Marcus 1986)*

A way for me to present an honest monograph of Danes attitudes towards English, would be then to publish transcripts of all the interviews I conducted, not holding off the contradictory examples, not explaining (imposing my understand that is), and putting the same emphasis on the interviewer's role in the construction of attitudes as upon the respondent. Although this non-interventionist approach does sound tempting, it is also unsatisfying. My attempt at a non-essentialist presentation

took another turn. I aimed for an interactive presentation exchanging the regular printed text for a presentation in Flash. The presentation itself is available at the website www.note-to-self.dk. Here I will briefly argue for its existence and explain the layout.

Cacophony – to lend voice to the people

Using a presentation in Flash (or any other interactive presentation) gives us opportunity to respect some of the ideals of pluriformity and suspended closure described above. The problem as described by Clifford & Marcus can be narrowed down to the fact that any presentation of knowledge is always presented from some elevated position. Presentations may try through various means to include themselves in the analysis or to analyze their own utterances as utterances on a par with all other utterances. The very nature of academic writing however, fights this attempt. In academic writing there is always one voice of writing or editing. Even if the author/editor quotes other voices, he is still a gate keeper who admits and rejects other voices and a conductor who decides when they can speak. Furthermore academic writing (perhaps all writing) has a normative demand for consistency. It is allowed to present contradictory statements, but then the contradiction must be resolved at some higher level. Most fundamentally, it seems as though the text fights the subversion of its own objectivity simply because it has a unilinear chronology. It is impossible in written text to say two things at the same time; and you cannot go from one point in the text to two related points. You have to treat one before you can turn to the other. As a commensurable of these characteristics of (academic) writing: you cannot give two contradictory claims at the same time – even when that is the most truthful you can say.

With a Flash presentation you can! Using Flash or other interactive presentations, we can maybe develop a style which is more consistent with the theoretical, methodological and political demands presented by social constructivism. As an added feature, interactive presentations are un-ended and never-ending. While the written text is already finished and can be grasped from beginning through middle to end, the interactive presentation is only ‘written’ when it is ‘read’. It is therefore impossible to uphold the illusion of a conclusion and a finished whole. The presentation ends when no one watches it. The conclusion is suspended and runs like a thread through the whole ‘reading’, or maybe it only takes shape after the reader has left it. It is certainly useless to look for the conclusion in the last page.

Layout

This presentation takes its beginning in the phrase “to lend voice to the people” – a phrase often heard in public discourse. The reading aloud of excerpts is therefore essential. The point is that the clear conclusion of the opinion poll (the headline) suppresses all of the arguments and the counter arguments. The purpose of the conclusion is exactly this, to minimize noise. I on the other hand insist that the noise is the real core of the investigation. The many intermingling voices with all their ambiguities are the ones who give the answer.

The voice is represented here by one person reading the answer of 47 respondents². Using only one reader has both a practical (anonymizing) effect and a theoretical point. The ones we are interested in are *the Danes* not a few scores of individuals. Using one voice, the answers come out as anonymous answers – in theory they could be anybody’s answer. They could even be the same person who had all the different views on the same subject. This point is further

² Needless to say, the answers have been cleansed of incomprehensible words, stuttering, false starts etc., but I have tried to maintain the overall tone of the individual answer.

emphasized when several answers are listened to at the same time. Because one reader reads them all, the answers will blend into cacophony. This is a metaphor for the project at large. When you follow only one person's reasoning, everything seems sensible, when you try to hold several answers stable to compare them, complexity tends to expand exponentially. If you want to define the all-encompassing 'voice of the people', you hear only confusion.

The presentation is composed of a number of imaginary 'rooms':

1. *The question*

The first screen shows the question the respondents were presented with: "To which degree do you agree that: It would be better if everybody in the world had English as their mother tongue?", and the range of pre-defined answers ranging from "agree completely" through "disagree completely". The reading of the question should bestow a feeling of being in the respondents' place. Answers presented on-line without preparation often seem confusing. By presenting the viewer with the actual question I hope to show why answers are as hesitant and ambivalent as they sometimes are.

Fig. 3: Cacophony, the question

Hvor enig er du i følgende påstand:
Det havde været bedst hvis alle i verden havde engelsk som modersmål?

Er du:

1. Helt enig
2. Overvejende enig
3. Hverken enig eller uenig
4. Overvejende uenig
5. Helt uenig
6. Ved ikke

- When the question is read through, the presentation continues to 'the main screen (2)
- If one clicks on the screen while the question is being read, one is sent to 'the main screen' (2)

2. *The main screen*

'The main screen' is the central and weighty part of the presentation. The other 9 'rooms' can be seen as commentaries to this. It consists of several parts.

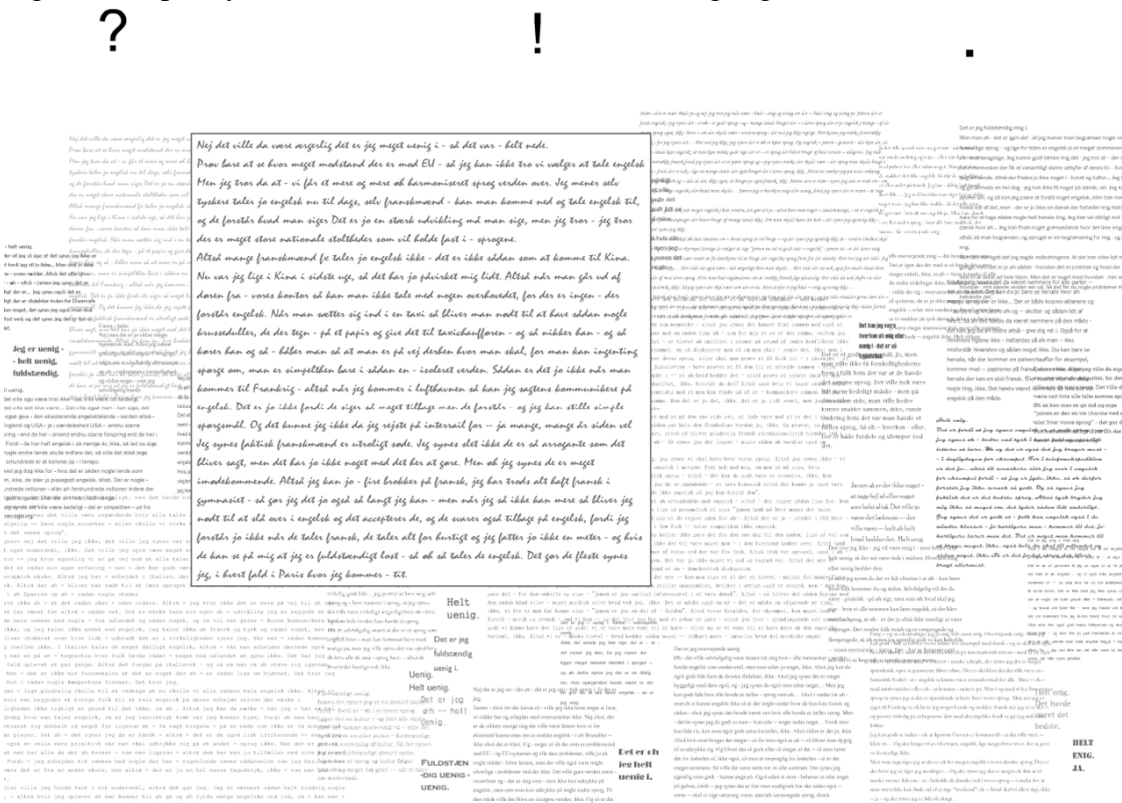
2.1 *The answers*

The largest part of 'the main screen', the entire bottom part, is filled with quotes from the 47 respondents interviewed. The answer of each respondent has its own square. Different fonts are used to illustrate different voices. The quotes partly overlap to illustrate the 'messiness' which is also illustrated by the use of cacophonous voices. The quotes are printed in gray in contrast to 'the question' (1) and 'the attitude answers' (3) which are printed in black. This of course is a metaphorical hint to us trying to see attitudes as black or white, when they often are rather shades of gray.

Fig. 4: Cacophony, the main screen



Fig. 5: Cacophony, the main screen with one answer highlighted



When one moves the cursor over an answer, it is magnified and lifted out of the mess with a frame. It is thus possible to zoom in on any given answer. Simultaneously reading of the answer begins and continues until the end of the answer. If one moves over a new answer, this will be the one zoomed in on and the reading of that will begin. But the reading of the former answer continues. One can start several readings in this way (depending on the power of the computer) and thereby see the cacophony of intra- and inter-discussant voices which are the theme of the presentation.

- If one clicks on an answer, one is sent to ‘the attitude answers’ (3)

2.2 The question mark

If one rolls the cursor of the question mark all readings stop. If one clicks on it, one is sent back to ‘the question’ (1).

2.3 The exclamation point

If one rolls the cursor of the question mark all readings stop. If one clicks on it, one is sent to ‘the newspaper headline’ (4).

2.4 The full stop

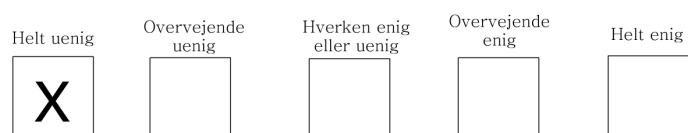
If one rolls the cursor of the question mark all readings stop. If one clicks on it, one is sent to ‘the narrative of the blind men and the elephant’ (5).

3. The attitude answers

If one clicks on an answer in the main screen one is sent to the ‘filtered’ quantitative attitude answers on a scale from “agree completely” to “disagree completely”. The transformation is (of course) sarcastic. When one removes the inconsistencies and reservations of the answer, one also removes the most interesting parts of it. And more fundamentally, one removes the connection the answer has with the lived world. The answer “agree completely” is hard to comprehend when it is seen outside of rhetorical context, preposterous even. When the standardized answer is seen in connection with its rhetorical presentation, most answers make good sense.

Simultaneously the attitude answers are meant to criticize that quantification treats things together that do not go together. As one can see from the answers, the respondents’ arguments for choosing the same quantified answer are widely different – often even contradictory.

Fig. 6: Cacophony, the attitude answers



- If one clicks on the screen, one is sent to ‘the main screen’ (2)

4. The newspaper headline

If one clicks on the exclamation point, one is sent to a fictional newspaper headline using the percentages gathered in the quantitative analysis. The headline is a comment to the way opinion polls are used as news. The critique is two-fold. On the one hand it is a critique that we have a

tendency to see the clear and stringent answers as *truer* than the ambiguous and unclear. The truth of the matter is the opposite. The noise is primary; the clear answer is an abstraction – or even an illusion. The headline rests only on the unstable support of the many confused voices; it merely fails to mention this in favour of a clear (but faulty?) statement.

On the other hand, it comments on the paradox that opinion polls can be newsworthy. If the participants form a representative sample of the population, their answers should never surprise the population, should it? Boldly stated, every opinion poll that makes a headline, should give rise to suspicion of (presumably accidental) manipulation. Either the answers lose their meaning when derived of context (as here), or the transformation from question wording to interpretation is not as simple as we are lead to believe.

Fig. 7: Cacophony, the newspaper headline

**22 % af danskerne:
Vi opgiver gerne vores modersmål
til fordel for engelsk.**

I en meningsmåling fra Opinion erklærer næsten en fjerdedel af de 1000 adspurgte at de er helt eller overvejende enige i at det ville være en fordel hvis hele verden talte engelsk. Og det er især de ældre medborgere og lavindkomstgrupperne der gerne så dansk udskiftet med engelsk.

- If one clicks on the screen, one is sent to 'the main screen' (2)

5 The narrative of the blind men and the elephant

If one clicks on the full stop, one is sent to the narrative of the blind men who meet an elephant and describe it from the part that they each touch, as a tree trunk, a snake or a spear. The narrative can be read as an allegory over the problem of the opinion poll; that it gathers the respondents' manifold, incompatible utterances under one uniting headline.

- If one clicks on the screen, one is sent to 'the main screen' (2)

Fig. 8: Cacophony, the narrative of the blind men and the elephant

De blinde mænd og elefanten
Der var tre mænd i Hindustan som aldrig havde set en elefant. Ja, egentlig havde de aldrig set noget som helst, for de var nemlig alle blinde. Disse tre mænd gik sammen ud for at finde en elefant, for nu ville de dog have opklaret hvordan sådan et vidunder så ud.
De fandt virkelig en elefant.
Og den første af de tre blinde mænd fra Hindustan gik hen til elefanten og følte på dens stødtand. Han udbrød fornøjet:
- Nåda! Hvad har vi her? Noget rundt og glat og skarpt. For mig er der ingen tvivl: En elefant er som et spyd!
Den anden nærmede sig dyret forfra og fik fat i snabelen. Den vred og snoede sig, som snabler plejer.
- Det er såre simpelt, afgjorde manden, en elefant ser ud som en slange!
Den tredje rakte ivrigt hånden ud og rørte ved elefantens knæ. Så lo han fornøjet.
- Det er nemt at afgøre hvad elefanten mest af alt minder om, sagde han, nemlig et træ!
Og så begyndte de tre blinde mænd fra Hindustan at skændes om, hvordan elefanten så ud.
- Som et spyd! sagde den første.
- Som en slange! sagde den anden.
- Som et træ! sagde den tredje.
Og på en måde havde de jo alle ret.

Conclusion

Whether this final 3rd order analysis is fruitful in that it brings us closer to the answer we seek, I will not venture to guess at. It is, I believe, a way to try and work constructively with some of the problems that anti-essentialist critique have posed. I am not claiming that I have shown the form of future academic 'texts'. But I do believe that future research with a broadly speaking constructivist approach needs to look into new and more theoretically consistent ways to present their analyses. Using computers and interactive presentation, and presenting them online open new paths that the research community will have to embrace. This was just a staggering step, but it was a step on that path.

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