

**LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES USED IN  
THE CONSTRUCTION OF  
PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT  
DISCOURSE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN  
WORKPLACE**

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## **DECLARATION**

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Tamiryn Jones  
February 2013

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the construction of Performance Assessment Discourses in three companies in the Western Cape, South Africa. The specific interest of is in how Performance Assessment Interviews (PAIs) are performed in terms of content, form, structure and social practice, and how managers and employees experience and make sense of this organizational practice. The study further investigates how individuals express their membership to communities of practice (CofPs) within the workplace, and seeks to identify obstacles (boundaries) in terms of acquiring and maintaining membership. This study is conducted within the broader framework of discourse analysis (DA) and employs genre theory and small story analysis as analytical tools.

The 31 participants in this study are managers and employees of three participating companies in the Western Cape. They are L1 speakers of Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa and isiZulu, and are representative of a wide range of employment levels (lower-level employees to top management). Each individual participated in either a one-on-one interview or in a focus group discussion, which were audio-recorded and transcribed. During these interviews and discussion groups, individuals frequently resorted telling small stories in order to explicate their feelings, perceptions and positions on certain matters. The data confirms that several generic features of PAIs are identifiable and across all three companies, but that some unique features are also reported. Furthermore, the analysis shows that Performance Assessments are sites of struggles as dominant and competing discourses emerge from the data. Additionally, the study reveals that acquiring membership to CofPs in a diverse workplace is a complex endeavour and that language plays a determining role in acquiring membership, as well as in the construction of workplace identities.

In conclusion, this study argues for further linguistic research within professional setting in South Africa, and suggests that CofP theory be revised and further developed to be more descriptive of diverse communities.

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie ondersoek hoe Prestasiebestuur (PB) diskoerse in drie maatskappye in die Wes-Kaap gekonstrueer word. Die studie stel spesifiek belang in hoe prestasiebestuur gesprekke (PBG) uitgevoer word in terme van inhoud, vorm, struktuur en die sosiale praktyke wat daarmee saamhang. Verder word die manier waarop bestuurders en werkers PBGs ervaar en interpreteer ondersoek. Die studie ondersoek ook hoe individue hul lidmaatskap tot praktyk gemeenskappe (verskeie groeperinge wat praktyke deel) binne die werksplek beskryf en die struikelblokke identifiseer wat hulle verhoed om lidmaatskap te verwerf en te behou. Hierdie studie is uitgevoer binne die breër raamwerk van diskoersanalise (DA) en gebruik genre analise en klein verhaal analise as ontledingsmetodes.

Die 31 deelnemers in die studie is bestuurders en werkers van drie deelnemende maatskappye in die Wes-Kaap. Hulle is eerstetaalsprekers van Afrikaans, Engels, Xhosa en Zoeloe en is verteenwoordigend van 'n wye reeks posisies (vanaf junior posisies tot topbestuur). Elke individu het deelgeneem aan óf 'n individuele onderhoud óf 'n groepsbespreking. Hierdie onderhoude en besprekings is opgeneem en getranskribeer. Tydens die onderhoude en besprekings het die deelnemers telkens van 'klein verhale' gebruik gemaak om hul ervarings en gevoelens te verwoord. Die data bevestig dat verskeie generiese eienskappe in PBGs geïdentifiseer kan word in al drie maatskappye maar dat daar wel sommige unieke eienskappe voorkom. Verder wys die analise uit dat binne PBs daar baie teenstellings bestaan en dat daar dominante en mededingende diskoerse in die data geïdentifiseer kan word. Die studie wys ook dat lidmaatskap tot 'n praktykgemeenskap in 'n diverse werksomgewing 'n komplekse onderneming is. Dit blyk ook dat taal 'n bepalende rol speel in die verwerwing van lidmaatskap, sowel as die manier waarop professionele identiteit gekonstrueer word.

Verdere navorsing in professionele kontekste binne 'n linguistiese raamwerk word aanbeveel. Die waarde van klein verhaal analise om diskoerse in professionele kontekste te ondersoek word beklemtoon en voorstelle word gemaak oor hoe die konsep 'praktykgemeenskappe' verder ontwikkel kan word om dit meer relevant te maak in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.

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### **List of abbreviations**

ABC	-	Abstinence, Be faithful, Condoms
CA	-	Conversation Analysis
CDA	-	Critical Discourse Analysis
CofP	-	Community of Practice
DA	-	Discourse Analysis
FG1	-	Focus Group 1
FG2	-	Focus Group 2
HR	-	Human Resources
L1	-	First Language
L2	-	Second Language
ODT	-	Organizational Discourse Theory
OT	-	Organizational Theory
PA	-	Performance Assessment/Appraisal
PAI	-	Performance Assessment/Appraisal Interview
PM	-	Performance Management
SFL	-	Systemic Functional Linguistics
SA	-	Self Appraisal
SSA	-	Small Story Analysis

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The study reported in this dissertation set out to investigate how managers and employees in three selected companies in the Western Cape construe their company's performance assessment (PA)<sup>1</sup> procedures and how they position themselves as participants within the process, and as members within a community of practice. This first chapter offers a brief introduction to the research and the dissertation.

### 1.1 Background and rationale

In the workplace, performance assessment interviews (PAIs) are commonly used for a variety of functions, such as evaluating and discussing employee performance, addressing areas of concern, discussing developmental strategies, setting future performance goals, and negotiating salary increases and bonuses. Essentially, these functions are performed through language, as PAIs are mostly a discursive event, using spoken interviews in the formal PAIs, and written feedback in the form of documents and reports. However, surprisingly little research has been conducted on the linguistic and discursive features of PAIs. This can be attributed to the sensitive nature of such interviews, but also more generally indicates a disregard of the study of language in the workplace.

Only recently has the workplace become a field of interest for linguists (see, for example Billbow, 1997; Koester, 2002; Vasquez, 2004; Schurr, Marra and Holmes, 2007; Vine, 2009; Holmes and Riddiford, n.d., Roberts, 2011 and Schnurr, 2012). Numerous studies have been conducted on workplace communities and workplace practices in the United States, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. The South African workplace has been greatly neglected in academic studies thus far. The research that does exist on language in the South African workplace depicts intercultural miscommunication as a great source of friction. Kasanga (2001) contends that inter-racial communication in SA is characterised by pragmatic failure and miscommunication in "same-language different-culture interaction" which leads to

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<sup>1</sup> Performance assessments are also referred to as *performance appraisals*, *annual appraisals*, *employee evaluations* and *performance reviews* in the literature. In this dissertation, I will use *performance appraisal* and *performance assessment* interchangeably. Less formal (ad hoc) interactions will be referred to as *performance discussions*.

resentment, racial stereotyping and negative labelling. Chick (1985:299) explains that when speakers of different first languages (L1s) and different socio-cultural backgrounds converse, culture-specific discourse conventions could easily contribute to “misinterpretation of intent and misjudgement of attitude and ability.” Holmes and Riddiford (n.d.) agree that culturally different ways of doing things are widely regarded as suspicious behaviour. They refer to research conducted by Bardovi-Harlig (2001), Kasper (2001) and Rose (2005) when arguing that English proficiency by itself is not necessarily to blame for problematic communication, and that a lack of understanding of culture-specific communicative styles is equally, or even more, problematic.

A multitude of training programs and new laws (e.g. the South African Labour Relations Act of 1995 and the Employment Equity Act of 1999) were introduced shortly after 1994 in order to ensure fairness and equality in the workplace after the onset of democracy in South Africa (Damane, 2001). South Africa has not yet reached such an ideal plateau and almost two decades later it cannot be disputed that transformation is an ongoing process. Steyn (in Grant, 2007)<sup>2</sup> explains that South African business organisations differ in their dedication to sustain this transformation. She argues that transformation cannot occur at an individual level alone, and that employment equity and affirmative action are “not enough” if only used for upward mobility focused on individuals, as opposed to creating deep structural changes within companies. Arguments such as these highlight the fact that organisations are sites of struggle and that organisational practices and structures have to be managed with great care (Van Dijk, 1997). This dissertation acknowledges the challenges of a transforming, multilingual, multicultural workplace and aims to investigate how a sense of community is achieved (or not) and how professional practices are constructed, thus questioning if such negative perceptions of the relationship between language and the workplace are still applicable today. I have chosen to focus on PAs as an example of an organisational structure as it allows a glimpse into the progression of transformation within three business organisations in the Western Cape. I consider PAs to serve as the ideal window for this inquiry as they create a space where organisational goals and personal needs are negotiated and aligned. This platform of interaction is also constructed under the pressures of certain social and political

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<sup>2</sup> This reference refers to Terry Grant’s interview with Melissa Steyn, the director of Intercultural and Diversity Studies of Southern Africa (at the University of Cape Town), which was published in a business communication journal in 2007. As the article is primarily a transcription of the interview, I shall refer to this source as “Steyn (in Grant, 2007)”.

expectations and is frequently linked to buzzwords such as *diversity management* and *empowerment* (Spangenberg, 1994; Damane, 2001; Grant, 2007).

From the perspective of popular online websites, PA is portrayed as an extremely beneficial and practical tool for identifying employee strengths and weaknesses, assessing an individual's potential in terms of further development, providing feedback to employees regarding their performance, and influencing their working habits. PAs also influence motivation, communication, and decisions regarding promotions, compensation and training ([www.managmentstudyguide.com](http://www.managmentstudyguide.com)). Some websites provide a more in-depth breakdown of PAs with regards to benefits respective to the organisation, the supervisor and the employee. Points of interest here are that organisations provide documentation for general promotion policies and procedures for individual claims of discrimination, that the supervisor demonstrates fairness to employees, and that the employee ensures that individual evaluations are indeed regarded as fair. In sum, these websites promote the usage of PAs by emphasising their positive outcomes such as better and clearer communication, as well as stronger relationships among employees and managers, if administered correctly (Armstrong, 2005; <http://www.asaecenter.org/Resources/articledetail.cfm?ItemNumber=18567>).

By contrast, scholarly work on the topic of PAs is less enthusiastic about this particular process as the researchers are predominantly occupied with factors which render PAs less successful in practice than in theory. Most noteworthy about popular literature as well as academic literature is that the focus is predominantly on the outcomes of PAs, and not on the then-and-there of the actual performance of the PAI (Cederblom, 1982; Spangenberg, 1994; Asmuß, 2008).

Alarmingly little PA research has been conducted within the context of the South African workplace, in particular from a linguistic perspective. One cannot help but wonder how applicable generic guidelines and assumptions such as those referred to above are to South African workplaces. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that international textbook guidelines and training programmes (mainly based on American and European literature) may not be entirely suited to such a unique context as the South African workplace, and that the existing body of knowledge on PAs may not be sufficient to address the specific needs of a uniquely diverse workforce.

By conducting this research, I was able to take a step back from the theoretical problem predictions synonymous with post-apartheid workplace-transformation, and generic international guidelines and “facts” about PAs. The study enabled me to investigate how the infamous *transformation* manifests itself in practice, and to shed light on why some groups are nonplussed by the debate around transformation while others are still involved in a daily struggle for equality and inclusion. The study describes how the workplace is constructed by employees and managers, i.e. how individuals talk about their respective workplaces, how they perceive communities or the sense of community within their organisations, to what extent they feel part of these communities, and how certain organisational practices support or hinder transformation and empowerment, as discursively constructed through language.

This study was born from a personal interest in workplace interaction and professional relationships among co-workers, specifically in professional settings populated by speakers of different L1s. The study is thus interested in how a diverse group of individuals come together in the workplace, participate in the same organisational processes, and engage in mutual activities in spite of certain barriers. This interest was further developed by investigating one such organisational process, i.e. the PAI. PAIs were specifically chosen as they are assumed to be rather complex structures, rich in linguistic strategies.

## **1.2 Theoretical position**

Taking into account Steyn’s (in Grant, 2007) argument that organisations use discourse to mask the lack of actual transformation within, it becomes clear that a discourse analytical approach is of utmost importance in the investigation of the social practices and realities within business organisations. Consequently, the study reported in this dissertation takes on a social approach to discourse analysis (DA), viewing PAs as professional workplace genre accomplished through discourse.

DA is an increasingly popular method in qualitative research, meaning that the aim is not to make statistical generalisations through the use of a standardised measuring instrument, but rather to allow for an in-depth method of, for example, identifying recurring themes, understanding relationships, and investigating power relations in certain contexts (Cameron, 2001). A popular means of qualitative data collection involves interviewing, transcribing the interviews, and analysing the transcriptions. Cameron (2001:14) warns that working with

interview data is often criticised as it is accused of being a representation of the truth (or reality) and not necessarily an absolute truth – this may be due to the fact that participants may tell the interviewer what they think the interviewer wants to hear, or that they actually believe what they are saying as they may be in denial or unaware of what is actually true. Regardless, it is doubtful that one would be able to identify “an absolute truth” by means of such a qualitative investigation; therefore researchers are more interested in *how* participants say things, than in collecting facts from the exact content of the participants’ utterances. DA provides unique insights into how people interpret and understand things and make sense of their lives. Consequently, researchers are moving away from creating illusions of certainty and instead focus on reflecting the “messiness of real life” as it emphasises the very real complexity of matters (Cameron, 2001:14).

From the broad domain of DA, I specifically chose small story analysis (SSA) and genre analysis to focus on elements of the verbal construction of workplace communities and organisational practices (here: PAs). The applicability and specific uses of these tools will be explicated in section 1.7 below. These analytical tools broadly allowed me to deal with important theoretical concepts such as ‘identity’ and ‘discursive struggle’. The concept of *identity* is viewed by social theorists as a malleable entity that is created by discourse, and altered according to context or situations; it also refers to the information that an individual displays about him/herself within certain circumstances (Paltridge, 2006:29). *Discursive struggles* refer to the instability of discourse, i.e. conflicting elements embedded within discourse (Livesy, 1993:63). Recent accounts of both concepts – identity and discursive struggles – indicate that discourses and identities are multi-faceted, and multi-voiced (Bakhtin, 1981; Fairclough, 1992; Butler, 1999; Bamberg, 2006). Discourse is also always in “dialogue” with other and competing discourses (Burman and Parker, 1993; Seidel, 1993; Fairclough, 1992, 1996; Livesy, 2001; Lessa, 2005; Jones and Norton, 2010).

The study reported in this dissertation also draws on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of a community of practice (CofP). The term *CofP* generally refers to a group of people who are brought together by joint endeavours and engage in mutual activities (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This study explored to what extent participants portrayed themselves to be members of CofPs in the workplace and identified possible obstacles in terms of acquiring membership. Such expressions of membership made palpable the effects of transformation in the respective workplaces. Wenger (2000) argues that CofPs are everywhere (at home, school,

and in our hobbies) and therefore we are all members of certain CofPs. This study was thus conducted with the assumption that all participating companies comprise of a collection of CofPs. The notion of a CofP proved not to be an unproblematic one, and subsequently the study also makes suggestions about how this concept can be more fruitfully employed in a transforming multilingual workplace.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

Based on a lack of research we know very little about the discursual practices in the professional context of the South African workplace. The existing literature depicts this setting as a cultural battlefield. After nearly two decades of ongoing transformation, it is necessary to revisit the workplace in order to re-evaluate earlier descriptions and to determine whether its image should be rectified. We can start doing this by exploring the ways in which common practices are linguistically accomplished, thus investigating the negotiation of language in a multilingual society. The participation in such practices may also reveal something about a perceived sense of community in a workplace, or the lack thereof – an issue which has been greatly unexplored in the past and of which we consequently have very little knowledge. This study consequently investigates the way(s) in which PAIs are discursively constructed and performed as professional genres.

### **1.4 Research questions**

The key research question that this study sets out to answer is: How do a selection of managers and employees (within three different companies in the Western Cape) experience and make sense of PAIs?

This research question was derived from a number of related questions emerging from the research gap in the literature:

1. How are PAIs constructed as a genre in three different business organisations in the Western Cape?
2. Which dominant, competing and individual discourses, respectively, are used to construct PAIs as a genre?
3. To what extent do individuals who participated in the study construct themselves (and others) to be part of a CofP?

4. What is the specific role of language in the construction of identity and membership within a certain CofP?

## **1.5 Aim**

The main aim of the research was to inquire how a number of managers and employees in three selected companies in the Western Cape construe their company's PA procedures and how they position themselves as participants within the process, and also as members within a CofP.

## **1.6 Methodology**

The study takes a qualitative approach in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the data. Factors which determined the design of the current study include (i) the fact that I have a social interest in the professional context of the South African workplace, (ii) the identities and the relationships of the actors within this specific context, (iii) an interest in the way that professional contexts and organisational structures are perceived by these actors, and (iv) the discursal/communicative activities the actors engage in to achieve certain common (or possibly self-serving) goals.

The data for this study were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews and focus groups within three participating companies in the Western Cape. The participants represent four different language groups (Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa and isiZulu), as well as a broad variety of employment levels. The semi-structured interview schedule was designed to obtain information about how PAIs are conducted and perceived within each organisation. During these interviews and discussion groups, individuals were able to spontaneously share stories and examples from their daily workplace routines. These tellings proved to provide invaluable insights into the accomplishment of professional practices and the construction of individual and workplace identities. Fairclough and Wodak (in S oderberg, 2006) remind us to "take into consideration the fact that people through their text and talk constitute specific social relations, identities and images of the organization, either maintaining specific social and organizational structures and practices or contributing to their change." The data thus contribute to a better understanding of the process of transformation in South Africa.

The data additionally exposed what are considered to be typical contents, structures and functions of PAIs within companies, as well as atypical patterns or perceptions of these theoretically standard processes.

## **1.7 Analysis**

The main analytical tools used to make sense of the data in the current study are Bamberg's (2006) SSA and Bhatia's (1993) genre analysis. These tools were specifically used in the current study to investigate the participants' subjectivities towards PA procedures, and how they construct and perceive the genre of PAs.

Initially, the aim of the study was to collect as many direct speech acts as possible by means of role-play. Despite carefully designing an interview schedule that would elicit such direct speech, participants ended up spending most of their time telling stories rather than role-playing. Although the interviews were thus not deliberately designed to be of a narrative nature or to elicit typically narrative responses, this is what happened during data collection. Bamberg (2006) poses that studying small stories is crucial to understanding "the big story"; therefore I had no choice but to analyse the unexpected amount of "tellings", examples and stories that spontaneously appeared in the interviews and focus groups, in order to understand each company's "big PA story". S oderberg (2006:402) argues that "storytelling is part of the process through which actors in an organization attach meaning to events and activities by entering them into the plot they have created on the basis of their personal experiences". The study reported in this dissertation illustrates that SSA can be useful not only for research within the narrative framework, but also in a discourse analytical study. Here specifically SSA proved to be an extremely useful tool to analyse how individuals function as members within a professional setting (as part of a group or a CofP), and to understand how these individuals perceive their surroundings, as well as the processes they are engaged in within a specific setting. Furthermore, SSA allows us to examine the nature of the social relations among participating employees and managers, and reveals how these participants position themselves within their workplace encounters. This study thus shows that while individuals are constantly constructing their own identities, they are simultaneously constructing a company identity through their responses and contributions during the interviews and focus group discussions.

I used genre analysis to give a descriptive account of the form, content, function and situated practice of performance discussions within the participating companies. Koester (2006:21) argues that genre analysis is particularly fitting for the analysis of workplace discourse as it allows for a “thick description” of data, lending itself to different levels of analysis (e.g. structure, content, function), whilst simultaneously taking into account the social context in which the discourse is constructed. The genre analysis revealed that PAs are a “site of struggle”, and that together with dominant discourses about what constitutes the genre, a number of competing discourses emerge.

The nature of PAIs in local settings will be used to explore the validity of generic Western literature and organisational theory in a non-Western context.

## **1.8 Chapter outline**

The dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides a discussion of DA, which serves as the dominant theoretical framework for the current study. This chapter specifically explains why a social approach was taken to investigate PA discourse. An overview of SSA and genre analysis is also provided as this method of analysis is specifically utilised to address the majority of the research questions. Seminal work on specifically social approaches to DA as well as SSA are reviewed, and a discussion of the main concepts and distinctions found in this dissertation concludes the chapter.

Chapter 3 functions as the second theoretical framework chapter and focuses on organisational theory. After discussing organisational discourse, I turn to PA theory in order to highlight the specific organisational process that is investigated in my research. Finally, I consider the concept of a workplace as a CofP. A literature review is provided for each of the focus points of the chapter – organisational theory, PA theory and CofP.

Chapter 4 presents information regarding the methodology of the research. This chapter describes the methods and instruments used for data collection and analysis, as well as providing information regarding the three selected workplaces, the participants and the context of the study.

The analysis and discussion of the data are divided over two chapters based on the two predominant research themes in this study: Chapter 5 sets out to answer research questions 1 and 2, i.e. to identify and give a detailed analysis of the dominant, competing and individual PA discourses within each company. The findings of this chapter are discussed in support of the notion that organisations are sites of struggle. The data also confirm that PAIs as professional genres contain a number of generic features, but are also malleable to a certain extent, depending on the desired function of the PAI and the context in which it is performed.

Chapter 6 focuses on answering research questions 3 and 4 pertaining to identity construction in the workplace and the expression of membership within a CofP. The chapter specifically investigates the role of language in terms of its function as a boundary object that needs to be negotiated to achieve membership within such a diverse setting. A brief evaluation is given of the applicability of Lave and Wenger's (1991) CofP theory in the context of the three participating companies.

In conclusion, Chapter 7 offers a discussion of the theoretical implications pertaining to social approaches to workplace discourse, followed by practical recommendations for PA procedures within the workplace.

## Chapter 2

### Discourse Analysis

DA is a relatively new theoretical approach to data analysis. It emerged in the 1970s, but its origin can be traced back to the ancient study of Hermeneutics (Kaplan and Grabe, 2002:192). The first influential work in this field can be attributed to Brown and Yule (1983), De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), Stubbs (1983) and van Dijk (1983) (in Kaplan and Grabe, 2002:192). DA is an umbrella term which encompasses a number of theoretical perspectives pertaining to the analysis of spoken or written texts (Cameron, 2001).

Before returning to what precisely the term *DA* encompasses in section 2.3, I shall firstly focus on the progressions that led to the development of this field of inquiry. Thereafter, I will briefly mention the most relevant frameworks associated with DA. Note that the aim here is not to provide an exhaustive account of each approach, as not all of them are central to the current study, but rather to illustrate the application and advantages of social methodologies concerned with textual analysis. I will, however, highlight a number of key concepts from these frameworks which are relevant to the present study. Finally, I shall consider the relation between discourse and communities, taking into consideration how and why people participate in verbal interaction, and how DA can be used as a tool of investigation.

#### 2.1 The development of social approaches to language

Through the last century a definite change in the field of linguistics has transpired. Language is increasingly investigated from a social perspective, complementing the more formal structural approach (Kress, 2001:32). Perhaps the best example of a structural approach to language is the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure's, theory of semiotics. Saussure (1959) viewed language as an arbitrary sign system in which signs only acquire meaning through their relationship to other signs. In his semiotic theory, Saussure distinguished between the sign and the object that it refers to in real life (the referent). He also conceptualised two semiotic elements, namely the signifier (the material aspect of the sign) and the signified (the mental concept signified by the sign), and further occupied himself with the correlation between these elements (Jansen and Steinberg, 1991). Kress (2001:32) argues that such a

theoretical approach views language as a system to be used, but not to be changed, by its speakers. Consequently, the practice of semiotics was mainly criticised for its focus on signs and their meanings, without taking the social context in which they exist into consideration.

The development of text linguistics also played a key role in enabling the different social views of language. During the 1970s, linguists expanded their interest from analysing conventional linguistic items like the sentence, to investigating larger units of interconnected sentences which in turn make up meaningful texts (De Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981). Some linguists started abandoning the practice of isolating sentences as they felt the method of extracting linguistic units from the natural context in which the sentence was produced, had become outdated and meaningless (Carstens, 1999). In support of this view, Gary (1976:1) argued that sentences are syntactically or semantically meaningless outside of a discourse context. As an initial result, text linguistics gained popularity among scholars without an actual method of analysis being in place. Van Dijk (1979) defended this growing unconventional interest by emphasising that there is no single correct application, method or theory for “text linguistics”, but that the term can be applied to any work that poses text as the key object of inquiry.

De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981:14) note that a preoccupation with the study of texts as units did not come into existence during the last couple of decades, but dates back to the linguistic practices of Ancient Greece. The study of rhetoric involved, for example, the training of public orators in terms of arranging ideas and expressions systematically within texts in order to achieve favourable effects on the audience, not dissimilar to the interests of modern text linguistics (De Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981:15).

Prior to the development of modern text linguistics, linguistic inquiry beyond the sentence was ascribed to the domain of *stylistics* which is based on the study of the selection of options for the production of texts in order to discover and describe styles (De Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981:16). De Beaugrande and Dressler explain that there are a multitude of structural and linguistic formats available to communicate one’s intentions and that the composition of sentences / utterances is not just governed by grammatical rules. An interest in these linguistic options (and the reasons behind the choices) thus motivated the combination of sentence-linguistics and stylistics which led to the development of text linguistic theory (1981:16).

## 2.2 Text linguistics

De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981:3) view text as a communicative occurrence. They argue that texts need to meet seven standards of textuality in order to succeed at being communicative (1981: 3-10): The first standard of textuality is *cohesion* and considers the way the actual words in the texts are mutually connected within a sequence based on grammatical dependencies. These grammatical norms and conventions allow for meanings to exist within texts. In their work on cohesion in English, Halliday and Hasan (1976:13) describe the concept of cohesion as accounting for “the essential semantic relations whereby any passage of speech or writing is enabled to function as text.” They identify five categories which systematise this concept: reference, substitution, ellipsis, lexical cohesion, and conjunction.<sup>3</sup>

The second standard of textuality as identified by De Beaugrande and Dressler is called *coherence* and functions at a deeper level than cohesion in the sense that it is concerned with the relevance and mutual accessibility of the subsurface components of the textual world, e.g. the construction of concepts and the connections of concepts, as opposed to only considering the actual words of the text. These connections (or relations) are necessary to make sense of the concepts in the text. These concepts could be linked by, for example, time, action, location or causality.

Thirdly, texts need to adhere to the *intentionality* standard which requires that the text adequately communicates the producer’s intentions in terms of attitude, plan, and goals in a cohesive and coherent fashion. This also applies to the fourth standard, namely *acceptability*, which concerns the receiver’s willingness to accept a text as communicative, relevant and useful, and his desire to obtain information. Intentionality and acceptability are often regarded as a “pair of principles” as both participants (the producer and the recipient) need to

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<sup>3</sup> *References* are cohesive devices used with the subsequent referral to newly introduced items in the text, e.g. pronouns, demonstratives, and comparatives. *Substitution* is used “in the place of” an item, e.g. nominal, verbal, and clausal substitution. *Ellipses* are used in the case of elements being omitted from texts. *Conjunctions* are used to connect additive, adversative, causal, and temporal propositions. *Lexical cohesion* refers to semantic relations, e.g. synonymy and collocation (Carstens, 1999:590)

adhere to pragmatic principles in order for communication to be successful (Carstens, 1999: 590).

The remaining three standards of textuality include *informativity*, *situationality*, and *intertextuality*: *Informativity* refers to the known vs. the unknown, the predictable vs. the unpredictable, the informative vs. the uninformative, or the expected vs. the unexpected nature of texts. *Situationality* holds that certain factors make texts relevant to a given situation or occurrence. This standard thus refers to the role that context plays in communication as it affects the way in which cohesiveness is achieved in a text. The last standard of textuality is referred to as *intertextuality* and refers to the sense-making of a text in relation to prior texts, as all texts rely on other texts to some degree.

De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981:11) argue that these seven standards of textuality function as constitutive principles of communication as they define and create the form of textual communication. If all of these standards are not met, then a text will be seen as a “non-text” and regarded as uncommunicative (1981:3).

Following Searle (1969), De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981:11) also distinguish three regulative principles of text that control textual communication: The *efficiency* of a text is dependent on the ease with which the communication is accomplished. The *effectiveness* of a text refers to the impression the text leaves with regards to achieving a specific goal. And the *appropriateness* of a text is determined by the relation between the setting of the text and adherence to the seven standards of textuality.

Cook (1992:23-25) clarifies the relation between text and context: He views text as “the linguistic form in a stretch of language” and discourse as “a stretch of language in use, taking on meaning in context for its users, and perceived by them as purposeful, meaningful, and connected.” This view depicts *text* as a linguistic product with the potential to become *discourse* and gain meaning upon the interaction with “knowledge of context” (1992:32). The term *discourse* is consequently more closely associated with a social approach to language. Cook (1992:29) postulates that concepts of literary cohesion, as put forth by e.g. Halliday and Hasan (1976), should be examined in order to firstly determine which typical uses of cohesion may distinguish them as a text type; and secondly, “the degree to which a description of cohesion may contribute to the realm of discourse analysis: the explanation of

coherence and the relationship between language and knowledge.” For this reason his work draws attention to the role of pragmatic theory in the development of a social approach to DA.

### **2.3 Social approaches to DA**

The growing interest in text linguistics provided a platform for the development of social and, more recently, critical approaches to interpreting text and discourse. Halliday and Hasan (1976, 1985) were of the first linguists to advocate the significance of context in text analysis, which developed into a quest for social meaning. They define text as a semantic unit to be considered in relation to context in order to be meaningful:

[A term] used in linguistics to refer to any passage – spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole ... A text is a unit of language in use. It is not a grammatical unit, like a clause or a sentence; and it is not defined by its size ... A text is best regarded as a semantic unit; a unit not of form but of meaning.

(Halliday and Hasan, 1976:1-2)

At a later stage they redefined the concept of text, stressing the importance of language as an instrument of social interaction that cannot be fully understood without taking the situational context into account:

Language that is doing some job in some context, as opposed to isolated words or sentences ... So any instance of living language that is playing some part in a context of situation, we shall call it a text. It may be either spoken or written, or indeed in any other medium of expression that we like to think of.

(Halliday and Hasan, 1985:10)

As approaching text from a social perspective became a more widely acceptable venture, a number of different strands of DA came into existence. (Examples of these strands will be discussed shortly). Jaworski and Coupland (1999:3) explain that this growing interest in discourse was due to a shift in epistemology, i.e. moving away from what we know, to questioning how knowledge is constructed through linguistic presentation.

### 2.3.1 Defining DA from a social perspective

DA is widely used in applied linguistics, but does not exclusively belong to the field of linguistics. It is a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of texts within social contexts (Bock, 2007). A multitude of academic fields are influenced by discourse analytical frameworks, e.g. sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, and intercultural communication. In this view, producing a single definition for DA proves to be quite challenging. Several attempts to define this particular method of inquiry have been made, each definition determined within a certain field of study or based on the focus of the research. Paltridge (2006) explicates that spoken and written discourse is constructed in specific social (and cultural) settings and therefore the ways of analysing, interpreting or understanding such discourse is manifold.

Trappes-Lomax (2003:134) broadly defines DA as “the study of language viewed communicatively and/or of communication viewed linguistically.” Other popular social definitions include “language in use”, “language in interaction”, “language in situational and cultural context” and “language above and beyond the sentence” (Trappes-Lomax, 2003:134). Phillips and Hardy (2002) see DA as a task of exploring the connection between discourse and reality. They state that:

... the things that make up the social world – including our very identities – appear out of discourse. To put it another way, our talk, and what we are, are one and the same ... Without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experiences, or ourselves.

Phillips and Hardy (2002:2)

They further expanded their definition in 2004, providing a more detailed description of what DA entails:

Discourse analysis ... involves analysis of collections of texts, the ways they are made meaningful through their links to other texts, the ways in which they draw on different discourses, how and to whom they are disseminated, the methods of their production, and the manner in which they are received and consumed.

Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2004:636)

As the present study is interested in the construction and the influences of these varying discourses (i.e., how people interpret and talk about PAs, the identities they assume, and the

degree of membership they experience) within a specific situational context (the Western Cape workplace), I wish to combine the definitions provided above and to locate them as a point of departure for my investigation into PA discourse.

In order to illustrate the scope of what DA entails, a number of additional social views and definitions emerging from the different strands within this field of inquiry will briefly be considered in section 2.3.2 below.

### **2.3.1.1 Discourse and social reality**

Phillips and Hardy (2002) state that discourse analysts reject the idea of a pre-existing social reality, but rather believe that reality is constantly formed and transformed by discourse as a social process. Cameron (2001:15) conceptualises this idea by saying that “reality is discursively constructed, made and remade as people talk about things using the discourses they have access to.” Within this context “discourses”<sup>4</sup> means more than just language-in-use, and, instead, refers to “practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1972:49). This notion is best illustrated by Lemke’s (1995) observation that individual voices and individual ways of talking are in fact not truly individual or unique in the sense that what one says, thinks, and perceives, is a reflection of the community’s voices. An individual’s voice is tainted with community influences such as linguistic strategy, repertoire and style; therefore it is illogical to assume such a thing as a truly unique individual voice or perspective on a topic (Cameron 2001:15). These social (community) voices are of interest to discourse analysts in terms of investigating discursively constructed realities. Cameron (2001:14-15) illustrates this point by referring to the multiple discourses of drugs in an attempt to explain how one topic may be discussed from different perspectives and in different ways, e.g. the illegal and criminal use of drugs, drug rehabilitations, medicinal drugs, illness and healing, and the recreational use of drugs. These concepts form a “network of thoughts and beliefs that set the agenda for debate and define what we perceive as reality on this subject,” thus these ways of talking lead to a discursively constructed reality

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<sup>4</sup> Note that distinctions are made between the terms *discourse* and *discourses*: as explained above, *discourses* (plural) is a term used by social theorists and refers to practices, whereas *discourse* (singular) refers to language in use, or language above the sentence (Cameron, 2001:15). Gee (2010:191) makes a further distinction, by defining Discourses (with a capital D) as distinctive ways of reading/writing and speaking/listening coupled with distinctive ways of acting, thinking, valuing and believing. Discourse is therefore closely related to enacting social identities and a much broader concept than a pure focus on language. Gee’s use of *Discourse* seems to be related to the way some theorists use *discourses*.

(2001:15). Cameron (2001:17) notes that there are opposing views regarding the concept of a socially constructed reality, but in spite of this disagreement, what can be taken from discourse is still not a collection of absolute facts, but rather a source of insight about a social reality. Some of these co-existing approaches to discourse and social reality are briefly presented in sections 2.3.2 – 2.4.

### **2.3.2 Systemic Functional Linguistics**

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was initially developed by Michael Halliday. In DA, SFL is concerned with the combined analysis of grammar and social activity. Linguists working within this framework look at texts as “bigger than the clause, and smaller than a culture” (Martin and Rose, 2007:4). Pertaining to the search for social meaning through discourse, Martin and Rose (2007:1) view text as a construction that is interactively shaped during social processes among speakers (or between writers and potential readers), and lends itself to interpretation of the interaction that it manifests. In other words, they argue that our lives unfold through different situations in which we assume the role of actors, learners, and speakers – leading to the production of texts which in turn can be dissected as sequences of meaning (2007:2).

SFL researchers are widely concerned with the semantics of discourse and view language as a social process, not an autonomous system. SFL can be described as the systemic study of interpreting texts in social contexts by specifically focusing on sequences of meaning contained in texts (Martin and Rose, 2003:1). Halliday (1978:3) explains that SFL aims to “look into language from the outside and specifically, to interpret linguistic processes from the standpoint of the social order.” Thus language is not seen merely as sets of rules, but rather as sets of resources for making sense of the world (Bock, 2007:56). In other words, sequences of clauses construct texts, and texts construct social context (Martin and Rose, 2007:4). Within this framework, grammar is seen as “meaning potential” which is functionally determined by participants when constructing utterances to represent experiences, manage relationships with co-participants in discursive events, and produce distinctive coherent texts, which can be understood at micro-level (clause or sentence structure) or macro-level (within a given context) (Trappes-Lomax, 2003:138). The SFL framework recognises three metafunctions of language in social activity: to enact relationships (interpersonal metafunction), to be representative of experience (ideational metafunction), and to organise text (textual metafunction) (Martin and Rose, 2003:6). SFL’s

applications to DA include: genre theory, grammatical metaphor, register as reflection of social context, information structuring, and interpersonal relations in discourse (Kaplan and Grabe, 2002:201).

### **2.3.3 Sociolinguistics**

Sociolinguists are primarily concerned with language variation and its significance within different social contexts (Chambers, 1995:1). Such variation studies often focus on issues such as gender, class, identity, and culture. The domain of sociolinguistics is therefore concerned with “investigating the relationships between language and society with the goal being a better understanding of the structure of language and of how languages function in communication” (Wardhaugh, 2006:13). Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (2008:532) argue that sociolinguistics and social anthropology are historically interrelated; however, social anthropology dates back nearly a century, whereas sociolinguistics is a very recently developed strand in the field of linguistics. Renowned sociolinguists include William Labov, Dell Hymes, Mary Bucholtz, Kira Hall, Shana Poplack, and Peter Trudgill.

Fundamental concepts in sociolinguistic theory include social networks, speech communities, and discourse communities, which are often investigated in the framework of DA, as individual and group identities are often believed to be partly discursively constructed. These terms will be further discussed in section 2.5.1.2 as they are specifically relevant to the identity work the participants within the present study do as actors within their different business organisations and workgroups.

A common occurrence in sociolinguistic studies is that conversation analysis (CA) is used as a tool of inquiry. CA provides a framework for investigating the achievement of shared meaning and mutual understanding through face-to-face social interactions. It seeks to understand social organisation through interactional procedures, rules and conventions. CA emerged from the field of sociology and was further developed through collaboration among theorists such as Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson in the 1960s. Their work stemmed from an interest in social organisation, a distinctive field of inquiry from the “cognitive revolution” prevalent in academic literature from the 1960s, which placed great emphasis on orientation to society and culture (Goodwin and Heritage, 1990:283). Goffman (1974:36 in Goodwin and Heritage, 1990) notes that “conversation” in CA initially referred to casual talk, but has more recently been applied to any spoken encounter. For the purpose of

analysis, it is however necessary to distinguish between mundane conversation and more structured forms of talk-in-interaction (e.g. interviews, medical consultations, debates, and court hearings) (Goodwin and Heritage, 1990:284). Conversation analysts, Goodwin and Heritage (1990:283), define social interaction as "... the primordial means through which the business of the social world is transacted, the identities of its participants are affirmed or denied, and its cultures are transmitted, renewed, and modified." CA developed as a subfield within the domain of DA and is described by Cameron (2001:87-89) as "a markedly 'data-centred' form of discourse analysis," meaning that it provides an apparatus for the empirical description of spoken discourse, as it focuses on "the data and nothing but the data."

## 2.4 Critical approaches to DA

Lessa (2005:286) states that discourse theorists, irrespective of their different approaches to DA,

all start from the broadly accepted recognition that language, the medium of interaction, creation and dissemination of discourses, is deeply implicated in the creation of regimes of truth, i.e. they explore ways in which, through discourses, realities are constructed, made factual and justified, bringing about effects.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) theorists are particularly interested in the relationship between language and power, dominance, discrimination, struggle, conflict, and control in areas such as institutional, gender, media, and political discourses (Wodak and Meyer, 2001:2).

Van Dijk (2001:352) defines CDA as "a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context". CDA is critical as it does not focus purely on theoretical or academic dilemmas, but poses further questions regarding responsibility and ideology – it considers those who suffer and those who have the power to solve the problems in question (Van Dijk in Wodak and Meyer, 2001:1).

Wodak and Meyer (2001:9) explain that the term *critical* "is to be understood as having distance from the data, embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and a focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research." Van Dijk (2001:352) further

explicates that CDA is not seen as a standardised theoretical framework or method of investigation, but rather offers a different perspective of theorising, analysis and application. As a result, traces of a CDA perspective can be found in a variety of research, such as CA, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and narrative analysis.

As the uses and effects of discourse are central in the shaping of realities, it is increasingly argued that DA should be incorporated in research practices (Lessa, 2005:285). Pertaining to the construction and maintenance of realities through discourse, Burman and Parker (1993) add that language also underlies struggles of power and control; therefore DA and CDA are widely used in the exploration of exclusionary processes, such as studies of racism. DA is also useful in enquiring how discourses facilitate legitimisation and enable change in certain social processes (Lessa, 2005:286). Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) emphasise the importance of discourse in economic, social and cultural changes. Butler (in Lessa 2005) observes that “while discourse constructs subjects and their lives, this construction is never complete and final.” This construction is rather a process in which identities are constantly under construction and shaped by action and agency.

I would like to argue that it would be unproductive not to consider the (linguistic) expression of power within organisational discourse, especially in relation to PAs as such interactions are often referred to as problematic (see Chapter 3). Power issues are often evident in interactions where participants are positioned asymmetrically, meaning that one participant has more control over the situation (Cameron 2001:162). Wodak and Meyer (2001:10) argue that language in itself is not powerful, but that it achieves power by the people who use it. Within this framework they describe ideology as a fundamental aspect of asymmetrical power relations, specifically with regard to the establishment and maintenance of this inequality. Texts have thus often been analysed as a site of struggle, where clashing power relations and identities meet. See section 2.5.5 for an expanded discussion of discourse as a site of struggle.

## 2.5 Key concepts for consideration

A number of concepts, used in social and critical approaches to DA, are central to the current study. This section will critically discuss these concepts, as well as clarify the position that will be taken in this dissertation. These central concepts will be the focus of the analysis chapters, and will be discussed in relation to the data in Chapters 5 and 6.

### 2.5.1 Identity

A particular preoccupation of recent social approaches to DA is how identities are constructed and enacted through discourse. Multiple definitions for identity exist as identity is defined differently according to the framework that is used (e.g. psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy). Theorists across the social sciences are increasingly adopting the view that identity is a social phenomenon, publicly created through discourse (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006:7). For the purpose of this study identity will be defined as the information that a person exudes about himself/herself at a certain time, depending on the context and occasion of the interaction (2006:39). As will be illustrated in the discussion below, it is quite possible for individuals to simultaneously act as members of different speech communities, discourse communities, and CofPs<sup>5</sup>. Thus it is fair to assume that individuals have numerous identities (see below), each of which requires a certain way of interaction at a certain moment. Consequently, individuals must have different communication strategies and a linguistic repertoire (a range of language varieties) to draw on depending on the situation (Paltridge, 2006:29). One may use different styles of communicating with a professor at a university, than with a child or a friend. Factors influencing such choices may include: the participants in the interaction (as well as the social distance between the participants), their status, the goal of the interaction, the social context and the formality of the interactional environment (Holmes, 2002). Paltridge illustrates this concept by referring to Tan's (2005) study of how teenagers in Singapore deliberately use slang to bond with their friends, and to keep the content of their discussion private, e.g. girls will use the acronym "CCG" among their friends to imply that a boy is a "cute cute guy". Tan (2005) found that this kind of slang-usage is often an in-group marker, along with specific dress-codes and hairstyles. The concept of repertoire as an in-group marker will be further developed in Chapter 6. The position taken in this dissertation is that identity is fluid and multiplex (Lemke 2008:18).

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<sup>5</sup> See section 2.5.1.2 for definitions of these terms.

### 2.5.1.1 Discourse and identity

Essentialist notions of identity have recently been replaced with the idea that identities are fluid and dynamic. People have multiple identities (e.g. mother, friend, doctor) which are displayed at different times and in different situations by using language in specific ways and through communication with others (see above). Paltridge (2006:38) explains that these identities are not natural and they are not fixed – they are constantly constructed and reconstructed through interaction (discourse) and therefore it is a two-way construction as an identity has to be acknowledged by the hearer/audience. Cameron (2001), Blommaert, (2005) and Schiffrin, (1996) are in support of the idea of a socially constructed identity. Bamberg (2006:75) argues that past research has focused too much on things that are consistent in data, for example, giving coherent accounts of self, or locating consistent perceptions among subjects, instead of investigating inconsistencies or equivocations in these constructions or perceptions. He poses that giving an account of something so fixed is unnatural and artificial. He therefore advocates the use of SSA as it is designed to focus on these aspects of inconsistency, especially pertaining to stories which are constructed in an interactive environment (see section 2.5.1.3). One thus has to take into account where the interaction is situated, which in turn influences how the story is told and how the identities of characters are constructed, consequently validating the claim that inconsistencies do exist.

Johnstone (2008:150-151) poses that people choose how to interact with others on the basis that they categorise them, and that people also orient themselves to the way they categorise themselves and are categorised by others, e.g. man, woman, child, student, etc. These identities that people adopt by orientating themselves to fit into certain categories, is best explained by Goffman's (in Johnstone, 2008) notion of "performances". In this light, identity is best described as "the outcome of processes by which people index their similarity to and differences from others, sometimes self-consciously and strategically and sometimes as a matter of habit" (Johnstone, 2008:151). Judith Butler is often credited for further developing the notion of identity and performativity in her gender studies. She views gender as a particular type of process which involves the "repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (1999:25). Butler (1999:25) states that "gender proves to be performance – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be", hence arguing that gender is a way of *doing* as opposed to a way of *being*. Concepts such as

‘performing identity’ and ‘identification’ are of interest to discourse analysts, especially linguists, as social identities can be marked by discourse styles and can therefore be seen as products of linguistic construction (Johnstone, 2008:152).

Bonny Norton’s (1997, 2000, 2001, 2011) work on identity and language learning is frequently cited by scholars in the field of language education. Contributions made by language learning researchers include, for example, investigations of the individual language learner situated in the greater context of the social world, the diverse positions from which such learners are able to participate in the social world, and their struggles in terms of appropriating more desirable identities as valued by the target community in which their language learning is situated (2011:414).

Bucholtz and Hall<sup>6</sup> (2005) provide a sociocultural linguistic framework for the analysis of identity production through interaction. They argue that identities emerge from interactions and comprise macro-categories such as race and class, and may be indexed by certain styles. *Style* refers to the different ways in which participants linguistically represent their social identities and individual personalities (Bock, 2007:52). Fairclough (2003) argues that in constructing our social identities, we draw on social discourses, and combining these two elements with an individual personality, results in an individual discursual style or “way of being.” He states that individual styles are characterised by features such as accent, intonation, rhythm, choice of words, body language, and facial expressions. This hypothesis is useful for this dissertation in the sense that participants’ individual personalities and ways of talking, social identities (e.g. managers, cleaners, secretaries) and workplace discourses are at play in the data.

Gee, Allan and Clinton (2001) used DA to study how teenagers from different socio-economic classes in the USA use language to distinguish themselves in different ways. The aim of this study was to investigate how social class manifests itself in language in a changing world (2001:176). They found that teenagers from the working class choose to fashion their identities in relation to a world of social and dialogic interaction. By contrast,

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<sup>6</sup> Bucholtz and Hall (2005) propose a framework for analysing identity construction during interaction based on five principles, namely emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality and partialness. A focus on these principles may prove extremely relevant in future investigations of workplace discourse and identity.

teens from the upper middle class prefer to fashion identities that communicate a desire to detach themselves from “everyday” social interaction and rather orientate themselves towards an “achievement space” characterised by family norms, schools, and other powerful societal institutions. The upper middle class teens also show a preference to cloak their personal interests and fears via the use of abstract language, whereas the working class teens are more forthcoming with such information through personalised narratives. Thus it was found that teens from different social classes use language in different ways to construe their worlds (Gee et al., 2001:176).

Another key concept of linguistic interest within this framework (relevant to this dissertation) is *stance*, which can be defined as:

a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture, and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field.

(Du Bois 2007:163, in Olinger 2011)

Olinger (2011) investigates the influence of social interaction on the construction of “discoursal identity” in academic writing through ethnographic methods. Stancetaking in group discussion and interviews is a focal point in her research. She finds that stancetaking is directly correlated to writer identity and is a worthwhile research topic in an attempt to understand discoursal identities.

### **2.5.1.2 Communities and discourse**

Cameron (2001:7) recapitulates the interest in DA by stating that “life is in many ways a series of conversations” and therefore DA is aimed at showing what *talk* achieves in our lives. From the perspective that discourse is a social construct, language cannot be investigated in isolation to language users and their reasons for engaging in interactions. This section will explore the relation between language and different groups of people. The concept of communities and membership is also of interest to researchers focusing on identity work, based on the notion that identity cannot be explored by looking at an individual in isolation, but rather in relation to how an individual orients him/herself to others within or outside their communities, in terms of similarity or difference.

A number of terms are used to describe groups of people who are in one way or another connected through discourse. These include *discourse communities*, *speech communities*, and *CofPs*. One should be careful not to assume that these terms can be used interchangeably as there are differences in classification: Paltridge (2006:24) describes a *discourse community* as a group of individuals involved in the same activity or belonging to the same association and participating in regular meetings, e.g. a group of call operators in a call centre. An individual can belong to more than one discourse community, e.g. one might work part time and also be a university student. Each of these may have their own values and beliefs and specific methods of communication. Within a discourse community there may be different degrees of membership and participation, and participants may also have to function in different roles within a specific discourse community depending on the social relations within the group, e.g. at a university an individual may be a registered PhD student, but also a member of staff (Paltridge 2006:25). Swales (1990:24), investigating professional academic genres, presented a set of characteristics for identifying a group of people as a discourse community: they must have shared goals (which may be formally agreed upon, e.g. in a club), and there should be methods for communication in place, and a way of transferring information amongst the individuals in the group. A discourse community should also have its own terminology, vocabulary and genres, and should be highly knowledgeable about their activities.

A distinction can be made between a discourse community and a *speech community*, the latter being a much broader concept. A broadly cited definition of a *speech community* in the field of sociolinguistics is:

a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech.  
Such sharing comprises knowledge of at least one form of speech, and knowledge also of  
its patterns of use. Both conditions are necessary. (Hymes, 1974:51)

A speech community essentially refers to a group of people who speak the same variety of language. This broad definition has been redefined in sociolinguistic domains as: “people who not only use the same language, repertoire or varieties of a language (and a set of norms for using them), but who also have the opportunity to interact with each other” (Spolsky 1998 in Paltridge, 2006). This key sociolinguistic notion developed by Labov, describes a community characterised by shared norms and consensus on the evaluation of linguistic norms, thus depicting the community as essentially cohesive and self-regulating (Milroy and Milroy, 1992:3). Other sociolinguists (e.g. Rickford, 1986; Sankoff, Cedergren, Kemp,

Thibault, and Vincent, 1989) have criticised this notion, arguing that too much emphasis has been placed on consensus and that conflict models have been neglected, thus not taking into account the growing evidence of nonstandard vernacular communities, segregation and linguistic differentiation between networks (in Milroy and Milroy, 1992:3). Milroy and Milroy (1992:5) broadly define social networks as a “boundless web of ties that reaches out through a whole society, linking people to one another, however remotely”.

Discourse communities can exist within and interact with the broader speech community (Paltridge, 2006:26). The prime distinction between the classifications of these two communities depends on the ways of belonging and the relationships among participants. The concept of a speech community is of particular interest to those who study written and spoken discourse and acceptable strategies of communication within communities (Paltridge, 2006:27). Paltridge explains that one may not be a “full member” of a particular speech community, but that one can participate to a certain degree, e.g. second language (L2) speakers interacting with L1 speakers of a certain language. Factors determining (the degree of) membership to speech communities include: proficiency in the language, race, age of entry into the community, gender, political factors, ethnicity, geography and culture (2006:28). Defining characteristics of a discourse community include that they have broadly agreed upon public goals (e.g. documented rules of associations or clubs); they have mechanisms for intercommunication (e.g. newsletters, meetings, telecommunications); they “own” certain genres (i.e. they have developed discursal templates and specific lexical items for sharing information); and finally, membership to discourse communities is also determined by knowledge of relevant content and discursal expertise (Swales, 1990:25-27).

In terms of the description provided above, a discourse community is quite similar to a CofP. Although a discourse community is sometimes referred to as a *CofP* (Wenger 1998a, 1998b, 2000; Wenger and Snyder, 2000; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999), these terms cannot necessarily be used interchangeably as a community needs to meet certain involvement and membership criteria to be labelled a CofP. Not all discourse communities are CofPs.

This dissertation will mainly focus on discourse in relation to the construct of a CofP in the broader setting of a culturally diverse workplace. The specific value of the concept of a CofP in a linguistic study will be explicated in the following chapter. Before turning to the next key

concept for consideration in the study reported in this dissertation (namely, context), a brief discussion is provided of SSA as a tool for investigating identity.

### **2.5.1.3 Investigating identity through SSA**

SSA is considered to be an extremely useful tool in the investigation of identity construction, proving itself paramount to the current study. Small stories are typically very short narrative activities told spontaneously in interaction in everyday settings about seemingly mundane occurrences. Small stories are not necessarily always recognised as stories as they are not always presented in a typical story-telling style (Bamberg, 2006:63). Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008:5) describe small stories as tellings of ongoing, future, hypothetical, shared, or past events, including refusals to tell, or stories about nothing at all. They can be about events that did or did not happen, and are often told to explain or elaborate on points made during everyday conversations. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou argue that small stories can easily be missed by researchers as the analytical focus is traditionally on “big” stories (larger narratives or life stories) which are typically characterised by coherent narrative structures in terms of progression of events in a specific temporal location, arranged along a plotline with a beginning, middle, and end (Ochs and Capps in Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008:5). In sum, “small stories” serves as an umbrella term to signify a number of under-represented narrative activities (2008:5, 6):

... we see small stories as not resting exclusively and reductively on prototypical textual criteria but as discourse engagements that engender specific social moments and integrally connect with what gets done on particular occasions and in particular settings. Our claim is that recognizing ‘narrativity’ or ‘narrative orientation’ in certain activities shows regard for local and situated understandings and decisively makes social consequentiality of discourse activities part of the analysis.

The “narrative turn” that has recently emerged has strongly influenced methodological considerations in the social sciences. The narrative turn holds the assumption that

... stories are privileged forms/structures/systems for making sense of the self, bringing the coordinates of time, space and personhood into a unitary frame so that the sources (such as ‘author’, ‘teller’, and ‘narrator’), can be made empirically visible for further analytical scrutiny in the form of *identity analysis*.

(Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008:2)

Consequently, SSA has become an increasingly popular analytical tool in identity work.

Bamberg and Georgakopoulou's five-step analytical method of SSA was developed from Bamberg's positioning model as put forward in 1997. Seminal studies preceding the development of Bamberg's five-step model include Bamberg's (2004a, 2004b, 2004c) recent investigations of identity formation in adolescent boys, specifically focusing on the concepts of *discourse development* and *positioning*. His longitudinal investigation of boys aged 10-15 incorporated naturally occurring data, writings about the "self", individual interviews and moderated group discussions. Probably the most eminent example of positioning stemming from a discussion group moderated by Bamberg, is the partaking of five boys in the activity of "slut-bashing" (Bamberg, 2004a). This study follows a micro-analytical three-step procedure examining the positions taken by the participants. The three steps guide the analysis, firstly, in terms of how the characters are positioned in time and space; secondly, how they are positioned in relation to each other throughout the interaction; and, finally, how the first two levels of analysis are used to "develop positions in relation to any pre-existing normative discourses", i.e. how the participants engage in "doing adolescence" and "doing masculinity" (2004:331,337). The premise of this study is revealing how *positioning* is incorporated in identity construction.

Georgakopoulou (2005) investigated "talk about men" from discussions among four close-knit female adolescents. This ethnographic study emphasises the interactional resources (e.g. nicknames, character assessments, membership categorisations, and stylisations) that interactants draw upon to refer to identity and gender identity constructions (2005:163). The data illustrate the obsessive talking about men, and the drawing of space for discussions of both specific and generic males in a romantic light. The study draws on the premise that descriptions of others are not considered as merely representative of others, but are also constructions of social and moral orders and realities (2005:164). Concepts such as "styling the other" are also pertinent to this study, as the study investigates how "people use language and dialect in discursive practice to appropriate, explore, reproduce and challenge influential images and stereotypes of groups that they do not themselves belong to" (Georgakopoulou, 2005:164). Georgakopoulou found that resources used for talking about men were embedded in and integrally connected to the plots of story lines. These resources also functioned as indexical markers, evoking a history of connotations and meanings, while simultaneously linking these men to social roles and identities ascribed to them (2005:181). The findings of

this study extended the spectrum of research on styling in two meaningful ways; firstly, highlighting the need to look for co-occurrence of styling with other representation cues, and secondly, suggesting the importance of locating examples of styling within specific discursive activities (2005:181).

Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) demonstrate the method and the functionality of the five steps in SSA using a small story told by a 10 year old boy regarding a male friend and a girl he liked. The five-step methodology stems from the three-step approach described in Bamberg's study referred to above, offering a more detailed analysis. Here, this method of analysis is used to demonstrate how aspects of identity construction and interaction may go unnoticed if not examined as in the proposed manner. The specific story provides an example of how a participant tries to distance himself from the action in the story, consequently shunning himself from the role of animator and principal (2008:15). This story also reveals how rhetorical work is done through story telling: putting forth arguments, challenging other's views, attuning stories to interpersonal purposes, and sequentially orientating towards prior and upcoming talk (2008:16). In this paper, Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008:16) also make explicit that tellings such as small stories are evidence that identities are not solid constructs, but that they are fluid platforms characterised by inconsistencies and contradictions. The five steps employed in the analysis in this study will be discussed in section 4.4.3.2 (enhanced by Barkhuizen's concept of extended positioning) as it will be used as a guiding method of inquiry in the present study.

This five-step method as set out above has been critiqued for being slightly limited (Ryan, 2008; Barkhuizen, 2009). Ryan (2008) supports the premise that the analysis of small stories can make visible "big issues" in the world views of young people. She examines how 16-year olds use small stories to accomplish interactional actions such as mounting arguments, introducing theories and gaining support for their views (while simultaneously engaging in identity construction) by method of CDA (2008:1). However, she claims that Bamberg's notion of analysing small stories to better understand the "big story" (as proposed in Bamberg, 2006) is insufficient for fully capturing multiple and contradictory positions of the self – thus suggesting that more than one "big story" may exist. Ryan argues that combining post structural inquiry with more socially critical views will consequently produce a richer interwoven analysis. The incorporation of CDA thus allows her to explore broader social discourses at macro level, both influencing and being influenced by individuals, whilst

additionally introducing power relations into the analysis. She found that her methodological approach allowed her to distinguish inconsistencies, intersecting stories, and power relations in the data. The data thus revealed evidence of multiple, changing subjectivities within a variety of discourse worlds, influenced by broader political and popular discourses.

Barkhuizen (2009) proposes an extended version of the five-step SSA as proposed by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (which mainly focuses on analysis in terms of *form* and *content*), by suggesting greater emphasis of the *context* (linguistic, social and cultural) in which the small story is embedded. He demonstrates his proposed analysis in the extended positioning analysis of a teacher's "better life" story, accordingly revealing how the teacher interactively constructs an answer to the question "Who am I?" (Barkhuizen, 2009:282). Extended positioning analysis essentially differs from SSA by allowing for the consideration of additional narrative data from outside of the small story in the third level of analysis. Barkhuizen (2009:284) thus argues against Bamberg's method of bracketing data, i.e. analysing small stories in isolation from the rest of the data available to the researcher. He finds that by incorporating a greater focus on context and larger discourses outside of the small story, his proposed analysis procedure overcomes the limitations of the original SSA method developed by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (see section 4.4.3.2 for a detailed discussion of SSA as it is to be utilised in this dissertation).

## 2.5.2 Context

Researchers who take a social approach to DA place immense emphasis on the role context plays in discourse production and interpretation. Conversation analysts, for example, see context and talk as existing in a "mutually constitutive relationship", which suggests that the relationship between context and language is a social process that is continuously transformed through time and space (Iedema and Wodak, 1999:8). Goodwin and Heritage (1990:289) argue that discourse is continuously changed by context, and shapes context at the same time. Therefore context cannot be seen as a static entity surrounding talk (or discourse), and analysis must stretch further than the investigation of isolated sentences or utterances, and focus on where they occur and how they are linked to other sentences or utterances:

... sentences (the abstract entities that are the objects of linguistic inquiry) and utterances (the stream of speech actually produced by a speaker in conversation) are understood as forms of action situated within specific contexts and designed with specific attention to these contexts ... (Goodwin and Heritage, 1990:287)

De Kok (2008:886) warns that an over-awareness of (cultural) context could result in “treating participants as puppets of socio-cultural forces”; therefore researchers should question the relevance of contextual features before taking them into account. She notes that the concept of context is often limited within CA studies as conversation analysts are hesitant to draw on the contextual setting of talk. One reason for this hesitancy is that context is generally regarded as highly problematic since it can be described in a number of different ways, which in turn raises questions about the relevancy of context. Theorists pose that contextual relevance can only be determined by the participants, rather than by the assumptions of the researcher; therefore it is necessary to investigate how context is perceived by the interactants during the interaction at hand (Schegloff in De Kok, 2008:887).

Hardy (2001:30) reports that empirical researchers in general are struggling with determining how much context is enough context, questioning whether text and context should be equally balanced, or to what extent context should be ignored in analytical processes. As mentioned above, paying too much attention to context could influence the objectivity of the researcher and distract from the focus of the particular text under investigation. The opposing argument is that data cannot be historicised when divorcing text from context (Van Dijk, 1997). Hardy (2001:30) suggests that researchers should explore the relationship between text and context in order to establish to what extent these two facets should be integrated to make sense of their data in a justifiable manner.

The concept of context is not just an important factor in CA, but features across a wide range of academic disciplines, e.g. ethnography of communication and interactional sociolinguistics. Martin and Rose (2007:1) pose (from an SFL perspective) that to find meaning in discourse, texts need to be viewed as more than just a collection of words and clauses, and should also be treated as more than an “incidental manifestation of social reality.” They invite social theorists to re-examine social activity as meanings negotiated through discourse within specific contextual settings.

Lemke (1998) concurs that language should always be viewed as part of a composite cultural activity and that verbal data only make sense when viewed in relation to a greater social context and how it is connected to other texts; therefore language alone cannot make meaning (see section 2.5.3 for a discussion on intertextuality). Theorists such as Erickson and Schultz

(1981) recommend different schemes for systematising what exactly constitutes relevant contextual factors to be taken into account when analysing verbal data, e.g. the immediate physical location, the relationship between participants, material objects, and semiotic representations. Lemke (1998) argues that the composition of such lists is almost redundant from the perspective that context is socially constructed through discourse and can therefore make certain parts of the immediate environment more or less relevant, or even change the meaning thereof. Correspondingly, Gee (1999:13) also views context as something that is projected, enacted, and constituted through discourse, and not as a fixed list of circumstances, relationships and objects. Thus the notion of context also includes psychological processes such as the participants' understanding of their circumstances or the interactional setting (Trappes-Lomax, 2003:145).

Other important contributions to the study of context include Goodwin and Duranti's (1992) study of language as an interactive phenomenon, Gumperz's (1982, 1992) work on contextualisation cues and Auer and Di Luzio's (1992) research on the indexical properties of language.

In the case of written texts, the concept of context is twofold: the context in which the text was written or produced, and the circumstances in which it is read. Lemke (1989) argues that this dual concept of context also applies to spoken discourse as one should consider the environment and circumstances in which something was said and heard.

### **2.5.3 Intertextuality**

Fairclough (1992:272) defines intertextuality as a tool for textual analysis with specific emphasis on the heterogeneity of texts, "which highlights the diverse and often contradictory elements and threads that make up a text". For this reason, intertextuality can be seen as the source of ambivalence within texts. Put more simply, if text is something that someone has said or written, intertextuality refers to instances where something someone else has said or written is incorporated within a text (Teubert, 2010:199). Intertextuality transpires in different ways, for example, quoting others, books, documents or movies directly or indirectly; referring to other texts by paraphrasing or mimicking the source; or alluding to something which causes knowledgeable participants to identify the source of the information. Intertextuality can be complex or simple – references to other texts do not necessarily involve referring to the actual words, but could also involve referring to certain communicative styles

or language variations (Gee, 2010:165-166). Such more subtle references were initially noted by Bakhtin (1986:89) who suggested that such dialogic qualities of text do not only manifest in a straightforward fashion, but could also manifest in more complex incorporations of genres, discourses and activity types which can in turn be reaccentuated by authors through, for example, mixing, irony and parody. Fairclough (1992:269) poses that the concept of intertextuality is particularly valuable to CDA in that it investigates how texts (produced during discursive activities, e.g. interviews, news reports, or conversations) are linked to particular social practices, and how these links are influenced by discourse practices (the production, distribution, and consumption of texts).

The term *intertextuality* was coined by Kristeva in the 1960s, who stated that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva 1986:37). However, the concept of intertextuality was initially developed by Bakhtin (1981) by introducing terms such as “multi-voicedness” and “heteroglossia” into the field of literary theory and literary criticism. Bakhtin noted that multiple voices can be traced within a novel, referring to “voice” as having “a particular intonation or accentuation, which reflects the values behind the consciousness which speaks” (1986:251). He also argued that every utterance contains traces of other utterances (or voices) within, accentuating the presence of centripetal (unitary language/discourse) and centrifugal (multiple, often contradictory, discourses), official and unofficial discourses within the same language (1981:248). The focus of Bakhtin’s work is specifically on the lack of attention to the ways in which texts are shaped by earlier texts (in Fairclough, 1992:269-270). He contends that all verbal and written utterances are orientated by previous utterances of earlier speakers or writers, and furthermore orientated to the expected utterances of following speakers or writers, so that each utterance can be seen as “a link in the chain of speech communication” (Bakhtin, 1986:89):

Our speech ... is filled with others’ words, varying degrees of otherness and varying degrees of ‘our own-ness’, varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and reaccentuate. (Bakhtin, 1986:89)

Fairclough rephrases Bakhtin’s idea of a speech chain by saying that utterances are inherently intertextual, which implies a cycle of history being inserted into texts, and in turn, texts being produced and forming part of history. Fairclough argues that this production and restructuring

of textual content and the creation of history may have a great impact on social and cultural change and should therefore be a focal point in DA (1992:270). He further explains that this kind of textual innovation is not without boundaries and is governed by conditional relations of power. This argument leads to hegemony theory also within the field of CDA which investigates how power relations shape (and are shaped by) social practices and structures (1992:271).

#### **2.5.4 Genre**

Genre is commonly seen as a specific instantiation of intertextuality as it relies on the notion that (dialogical) texts gain meaning when produced, distributed and interpreted in certain conventionalised manners within specific contexts. The classification and analysis of specific text types or genres pre-dates the development of DA. Literature and narratives have often been analysed as genres. Early studies include Labov's (1972) account of narrative structures, and Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) research on classroom discourse.

Genre analysis has recently become a productive way of analysing text produced through certain discourses, within the framework of DA (Swales, 1990; Yates and Orlikowski, 1992; Bhatia, 1993, 1996; Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995). The premise of genre is also shared by other language study frameworks as it places language in context, and allows for the evaluation of suitability within that context (Bock, 2007). During the 1980s the study of school-based genres became quite popular among Australian linguists (Paltridge, 1997; Martin, 2000). The aim of such studies is predominantly to enhance literacy instruction. Thereafter this approach was extended across cultural, academic and professional contexts (Kaplan and Grabe, 2002:203). From a CDA perspective genre analysis is partly employed to inquire into the role specific genres play in exercising power (Blackledge, 2005:9). In the present study genre cannot be ignored as the context of the professional workplace is a determining influence on the construction of each company's general PA discourse and, more specifically, the PAI, both of which were discussed during the research interviews conducted with the participants.

Chilton and Schäffner (in Blackledge 2005:8) contend that discourse is neither completely homogenous nor totally heterogeneous; therefore an understanding of the concept of 'genre' is absolutely essential. Blackledge (2005:8) explains that the variability of discourse is not random, but that patterns are produced in a relatively stable fashion over time in relation to

the circumstances (context, use, historical period) in which the discourse is shaped. No standard definition exists for “genre” as different disciplines offer an assortment of possible explanations and examples of this concept, each adopting the one most suited for a specific purpose. Martin and Rose (2007:8) offer a description of the concept of genre that does not restrict one to a strictly SFL approach to text analysis:

[Genre is] a staged, goal oriented social process. Social because we participate in genres with other people; goal oriented because we use genres to get things done; staged because it usually takes us a few steps to reach our goals.

Another definition is provided by Trappes-Lomax from a discourse analytical perspective (2003:147):

Genre is the set of purpose-determined conventions in accordance with which the discourse proceeds on a particular occasion. These include the staged patterning of the discourse, typical topics, and features of register.

For the purpose of CDA (specifically focusing on politics and the media), Blackledge (2005:8) suggests following Chilton and Schäffner’s definition of genres:

... as global linguistic patterns which have historically developed for fulfilling specific communicative tasks in specific situations. That is, genre refers to the type and structure of language typically used for a particular purpose in a particular context.

Correspondingly, Fairclough (2003:26-27) offers a similar definition of *genre* as “ways of (inter)acting discursively”. He however emphasises that genre as discourse is part of social activity, which in turn implies social relations. In line with SFL, Fairclough (2003:26-27) supports the view that texts are functional, but chooses to refer to this multi-functionality of texts as the three major types of meaning in texts, namely: *action*, *representation*, and *identification*. He indicates a correspondence between action and genre in the sense that *action* here refers to the way texts (inter)act in social events, and the way social relations are enacted, e.g. a moderator conducting an interview with a manager at a business organisation. The social relation in this example may be described as someone eliciting information and/or advice from someone who knows more about a certain topic.

The present study will adopt a combined view of the definitions above, i.e. that genres are specific ways of interacting, signified by specific types and structures (and patterns) of

language used in social contexts, and for particular purposes. In this dissertation, genre is also viewed as embedded in social practice or ways of doing.

Genres are free of rigid typology as the malleable structures of which genres are composed are dependent on the function that the discourse needs to accomplish, e.g. specific ways of talking are necessary (and expected) in classroom situations, as opposed to job interviews or political speeches (Blackledge, 2005:9). As these specific ways of communicating have been repeated continuously in the past, members of linguistic communities are knowledgeable about different types and structures of discourse (Blackledge, 2005:8). Martin and Rose (2007:8) claim that different types of texts present various social contexts, and that as children, we learn to identify and differentiate between genres specific to our culture: different genres have consistent patterns which enable people to predict how a situation may unfold; it can teach us how to manage new information, or prescribe how we should react or interact in different situations. Examples of such genres include greeting cards, casual conversations, jokes, games, and telephone enquiries.

Fairclough (2003) adds that although genres can be seen as relatively stable and durable ways of acting (in that genres encompass rather typical language patterns), it does happen that atypical patterns are selected for certain tasks. He refers to such unconventional structures (or genres used outside of the expected context) as “disembedded” genres which are often used in new or different ways (2003:68).

Texts may also be hybrid in the sense that more than one genre is at play, meaning that more than one voice may be traceable in a certain text (Fairclough, 2003:34). Fairclough distinguishes between mixing genres, and genre chains: *Genre mixing* would, for example, be evident in a journalistic feature article which incorporates advertising strategies and tourist brochures, and would possibly be highlighted by the layout and the organisation of the text (Fairclough, 2003:34). *Genre chains* are of particular significance to the concept of *mediation* which refers to the “movement of meaning from one social practice to another, from one event to another, and from one text to another”, something which involves a complex network of texts (Fairclough, 2003:30). Genre chains are different genres that are frequently linked together and characterised by the systematic transformation from one genre by another. Fairclough (2003:31) contends that this phenomenon has the potential to expand the scope of possible action by surpassing time and space, and linking different social events and

social practices, across different countries, and facilitating the exercise of power over a distance.

Fairclough (2003:32) argues that genres are also crucial for maintaining and regulating social practices. He refers to this concept as the “governance of society”, which implies sustaining the institutional structure of society (e.g. structural relations between businesses, universities, government, and the media). The concepts of genre mixing and genre chains are therefore significant on a global scale as they facilitate social transformation by means of networking social practices (2003:38).

Relevant examples of genre-based research in professional settings will be discussed in section 3.3 in the following chapter.

### **2.5.5 Discourse as site of struggle**

From a CDA perspective, Fairclough (1992) argues that discourse should be studied through a three-dimensional approach by connecting texts to discourses, locating them in specific historical and social contexts, in which we focus on the situation in terms of the participants/actors, their relationships and practices. Fairclough’s (1996:55) statement that “no text is an island” draws attention to the fact that texts are historically and socially linked within a certain context, and that texts are the products of mixed genres and discourse. Therefore texts are regarded as “sites of struggle” (Trappes-Lomax, 2003:151). Such “struggles” within texts are most evident in instances of dominant and competing/contradicting discourses emerging from the same platform.

Livesey (2001), following Fairclough, argues that discourses constitute the common sense of culture, i.e. within social life certain actions become disciplinary forces, permitting and limiting the achievement of certain meanings. Therefore discourses have the ability to reflect and sustain social (and institutional) forms and practices, consequently arranging the world in certain acceptable ways (1993:62-63). However, it is not to say that society is neatly structured by a unanimously agreed upon dominant discourse giving specific meaning to specific events or practices. Livesey (1993:63) describes the discursive space as “unstable”, meaning that different discourses interpolate one another (i.e. discourses interject, interpose, or alter other discourses without authorisation), but at the same time contest one another:

... as a result, discourses often have embedded within them conflicting or contradictory elements, and actors located within particular discursive domains may experience different subject positions, social and institutional practices, normative understandings, and ways of organizing. Practically speaking, this means that organizations, like other actors, must ceaselessly compete in a process that is social and political, to reproduce their discourses – that is, to sustain their stories and their definitions of, for instance, progress and development, or their notions of the boundaries and legitimate activities of the firm. ... new discourses and discursive forms continue to emerge ... this processes both facilitates and reflects social and institutional change ...

Studies on discursive struggles include Lessa's (2005) research on the conflicting views of single mothers. She compares attitudes towards widowed, divorced, or abused mothers with attitudes towards teen motherhood (2005:288). She argues for the employment of DA in considering the struggles of social welfare. Her work addresses the widespread condemnation of teen motherhood and the marginalised and moralised identities attributed to teenage mothers by society. She focuses on the impact of discursive strategies used by non-profit welfare services (specifically, feminist organisations) to constitute a sense of empowerment, support and advocacy for these single mothers. The genres under investigation included brochures, websites, personal discussions, proposals for funding, and evaluative visits. Lessa (2005:288) argues that "discourse is a central tool with which these organizations engage with dominant hegemonic views of single mothers." She finds that these organisations divert possible sponsors' attention from blaming these young mothers for their choices, to rather focusing on their realities, such as the lack of support, and economic and demographic backgrounds. The organisation also subverts stereotypes of these girls by providing them with more complex identities, illustrating that no single categorical description can be attributed to their user base (2005:290-291). Finally, these organisations attempt to formulate a view of entitlement, distinguishing the organisations' service users (i.e. young mothers) from the stereotypical welfare-users. These teens are portrayed as entitled citizens who are actively seeking change rather than passively accepting welfare (2005:291). Lessa emphasises that these discourses co-exist with more traditional views of teen pregnancy and motherhood. She advocates that subversive discourses need to ingrain subversive practices in society, and that such discourse and practices are in continual need to be reviewed by society (2005:293).

Seidel (1993) set out to identify the competing HIV/AIDS discourses circulating in sub-Saharan Africa. Eight respective discourses were identified: Development Discourse, Medico-Moral Discourse, Legal Discourse and Human Rights Covenants, Ethical Discourse, and Activist Discourse. Among these, two dominant discourse streams were identified: (i) discourses of rights and empowerment, and (ii) discourses of control and exclusion. Seidel (1993) views CDA as concerned with language as a political object or a tool of control, associated with ways in which discourse is linguistically and politically connected. Seidel claims that most illuminating discourse analytical studies are from a minority perspective, and are concerned with the construction and oppression of powerless groups through discourse (1993:175). Such typical minority orientated studies have generally been conducted in medical settings, or to scrutinise gender or religious issues (1993:175).

Jones and Norton's (2010) work on Uganda's ABC program on HIV/Aids Prevention also focuses on discursive inconsistencies. Jones and Norton (2010:155-156) state that poststructuralist theories of discourse view language as conceptualised complexes of signs and practices by which social existence and social reproduction is organised. They pose that the "discourses of HIV/AIDS construct and are constructed by a variety of social relationships" (2010:156). They argue that due to the competing claims of truth about the origin and the spread and control of HIV/AIDS, discourses around this disease can be regarded as a site of struggle (2010:156). In their work on the ABC (abstinence, be faithful, condoms) Program on HIV/AIDS prevention in Uganda, they explore how the discourse of HIV/AIDS is constituted in and by language and other meaning making practices associated with this infection. They consider the implications of Uganda's HIV/AIDS prevention policy on three levels:

- Macro (policy makers and the policy's relation to national and global agendas of development, particularly discourses on condoms)
- Institutional (teachers and health education in schools)
- Micro (females who daily negotiate the prevention program's policies, and the notion that AIDS is increasingly "feminized").

Jones and Norton (2010) report on conflicting governmental campaigns, first promoting the use of condoms, then reverting to advocating abstinence; the debate about the ABC discourse being "hijacked by ideology linked to US funding"; how the ABC-ownership feud impacted

health education in schools with regards to communicating these conflicting messages to students, followed by religious groups' condemnation of new "pornographic" textbooks of sex education; and, finally, at micro level, the difficulties young women in rural areas face (e.g. accepting money for sex to pay for their education, being pressurised to have sex, the unobtainability of condoms in rural areas, and convincing their partners to practise safe sex) (2010:158-162). This study demonstrates that the ABC program is a site of struggle in which international agendas take preference over the individuals affected by the program. They found that these discourses significantly influence the lives of people and lead to undesired consequences. These findings clearly indicate that the ABC-policy has severe limitations and remains problematic across all three levels of inquiry, for all people involved (2005:166). In conclusion Jones and Norton (2010:167) request that policy makers listen to the voices of the young women who are affected by the implementation of these programs.

This dissertation explores PAs as sites of struggle, suggesting that the ways in which PA discourses are proposed, discussed, and materialised, shape the range of possibilities informing the definition and interpretation of these organisational processes, as well as the social practices that go with the particular discourses.

## **2.6 Summary**

This chapter provided an outline of the theoretical framework for the analysis of PA discourse in Chapter 5. The concept of identity as a social construct was explicated as it is of great relevance to the discussion of the data in Chapter 6. The usefulness of SSA as analytical tool in identity construction was interrogated. This form of analysis is particularly relevant to Chapter 6. The current study was conducted from the premise that discourse cannot be divorced from social context as discourse is indeed a product of social construction. This chapter has also made explicit the value of genre analysis to discourse analytical studies, whilst preparing for the discovery of discursive struggles to be found in the data.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Discourse in Organisations**

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce different aspects of importance to the present study pertaining to business organisations. First, organisational theory will be presented and discussed in terms of the linguistic turn in its approach. The relevance and benefits of incorporating a language-based approach to organisational theory will be described. Next, organisations will be viewed as CofPs and the incorporation of the notion of a CofP within a linguistic study will be justified. Thereafter, PAs will be discussed in terms of characteristics, structure, function, and linguistic interest in the topic, and, finally, a summarised account of previous literature on the topic will be presented. These three aspects of business organisations (organisational theory, CofPs and PAs) are interwoven and specifically prominent in the study reported in this dissertation, i.e. in the investigation of the linguistic construction of PA discourses in the Western Cape.

### **3.1 Organisational theory**

#### **3.1.1 Introduction**

Giddens (in Iedema and Wodak, 1999) defines an organisation as “a large association of people run on impersonal lines, set up to achieve specific goals”. Organisational theory (OT) can simply be described as “the study of organizations for the benefit of identifying common themes for the purpose of solving problems, maximizing efficiency and productivity, and meeting the needs of stakeholders” (Barzilai, n.d.). However, there are a variety of approaches to OT, e.g. the modernist theory attempts to explain organisation phenomena as independent objective entities; the symbolic-interpretive approach aims to produce understanding and appreciation of organisational processes as webs of relationships and meaning; and postmodernist approaches investigate organisations as created realities, i.e. as the “outcomes of linguistic convention and discursive practice” (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006:20).

As the present study is of a linguistic nature, the main focus of this chapter specifically, and the present study in general, will be on researching organisational discourse.

### **3.1.2 The linguistic turn**

Iedema and Wodak (1999:14) describe earlier organisation research as concerned with abstract macro-social categories of norms and structures, as opposed to latter postmodern approaches which favour micro-details of talk, interactions and behaviour. Prior to 1990, discursive organisational research tended to focus on the sole institutional setting of doctor-patient interactions (Grant, Keenoy and Oswick, 2001). This discursive-based approach only appeared in the organisational and management literature about two decades ago. The linguistic turn (or “turn to language”) in organisational research led to a field of inquiry labelled “organizational discourse” (Iedema and Wodak, 1999; Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick, 2001). Organisational research has undergone a palpable shift in focus as language was suddenly seen as a constitutive of organisations:

... of all organizational forms, language has a special position. All other organizational forms may be translated into language. Further, every perception is dependent on the conceptual apparatus which makes it possible and meaningful as this conceptual apparatus is inscribed in language. Talk and writing are thus much more than the means of expression of individual meanings: they connect each perception to a larger orientation and system of meaning. The conceptual distinctions in an organization are inscribed in the systems of speaking and writing.

(Deetz, 1982:135 in Iedema and Wodak, 1999)

Deetz further poses that “language both constitutes and is constituted by social practices”, therefore organisations do not already exist, but are brought into existence by acts of communication among organisational members (Iedema and Wodak, 1999:7).

### **3.1.3 Linguistic characteristics of organisational discourse**

Organisational discourse is becoming an increasingly significant field of study as it is argued to contribute to a better understanding of organisations. Hardy also acknowledges this linguistic turn in that scholars are progressively more concerned with “conceptualizing societies, institutions, and identities as discursively constructed collections of texts and, in so doing, are focusing on language use as the central object of study” (2001:25). Main concerns of organisation research, such as power, hegemony and ideology, were previously seen as historical-material conditions, but are now considered as linguistic practices, best investigated through linguistic-discursive methodologies (Iedema and Wodak, 1999:7).

Parker (1992) suggests that *discourse* is a system of texts that “bring objects into being” and that are made meaningful through the production, dissemination, and consumption of these texts. Consequently, DA is seen as the study of these texts in an attempt to find meaning (Hardy, 2001). Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2004:460-462) state that organisations produce a vast amount of texts and not all can be considered meaningful within certain contexts, and therefore not all text may influence discourse. They argue that in order for a text to be “taken up” texts must “leave traces”. In other words, some texts are merely fleeting events, but others communicate meaning that influences discourse over a period of time, which then becomes incorporated in practice. From this perspective it is argued that discourse is progressively built up as texts move from the local to the global (2004:640).

As mentioned above, it is also argued that discourse holds constitutive qualities and is “central to the social construction of reality” and therefore our attitudes, behaviour, and perceptions of reality are shaped by discursive practices (Grant, et.al., 2001:7). This notion is best explained in terms of organisational theory by Mumby and Clair (in Grant et al., 2001:8):

... when we speak of organizational discourse, we do not simply mean discourse that occurs in organizations. Rather, we suggest that organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse. This is not to claim that organizations are “nothing but” discourse, but rather that discourse is the principal means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are.

(Mumby and Clair, 1997:181)

In light of this statement, Grant et al. (1998) offer a definition of organisational discourse as the “languages and symbolic media we employ to describe, represent, interpret and theorize what we take to be the facticity of organizational life.”

Van Dijk (in Hardy, 2001), writing from a CDA perspective, warns that organisations should not be seen as platforms where shared meaning is produced, but rather as “sites of struggle where different groups compete to shape the social reality of organizations in ways that serve their own interests”; thus discursive activity can be seen as a political form. Multiple discourses can be produced within a single setting. Organisational discourse theory (ODT) suggests that some discourses may be dominant within a certain context, and that others may be taken for granted. This dominance is not necessarily the result of fixed power relations,

but is in actuality the outcome of the persistent negotiation of power through competing discourses in the reproduction and transformation of day to day activities (2001:28). Similarly, Fairclough (1995:40) accentuates the thought that institutions are not monistic (uniform), but pluralistic, i.e. they provide “alternative sets of discursal and ideological norms”; consequently, organizational discourses may represent competing ideological positions. The notion of contradictory discourses particular to the present study’s data will be illustrated in Chapters 5 and 6.

### **3.1.4 Main concerns of organisational discourse**

ODT sets out to investigate issues such as organisational discursive practice, power, reproduction, decision making, and impersonalisation (Iedema and Wodak, 1999). As mentioned earlier, organisations are defined as large groups of people governed by impersonal lines; hence researchers are concerned with the question of how personalised doings result in depersonalised practices that become historical institutions (1999:11). They also question the position of power in organisations and ask: “how is the organisational power achieved?” or “how do specific discourses gain or lose organisational ascendancy?” Iedema and Wodak recapitulate power as both a product and a process - it is comprised and replicated through routinised organisational interaction (e.g. meetings), communication and symbolism. They state that power can be manifested in hierarchy and as establishment, and that it maintains organisational beliefs, values, rituals, obedience, behaviour, symbols and practice (1999:11-12). It is only natural to assume that the understanding of such a conception with such a vast impact on organisations will benefit from scholarly attention.

### **3.1.5 Research on ODT**

In spite of certain stumbling blocks (which will be discussed in section 3.1.6 below), the overwhelming consensus in the literature is that linguistic-discursive approaches to OT hold various benefits paramount to the study and understanding of organisations. Grant et al. (2001:8-14) address each of the concerns listed below and conclude that these criticisms are often outdated, untrue or unfounded as they are primarily based on a disregard for the value of discourse-sensitive approaches to understanding organisations. Their argument is supported by examples of several recent scholarly contributions demonstrating the value of such approaches (Hardy, 2001; Cohen and Mallon, 2001; Huisamen, 2001; Washbourne and Dicke, 2001).

Hardy, Lawrence, and Phillips (1998) and Hardy and Phillips (1999) find that DA is a particularly useful way to explore the manner in which actors participate in discursive activities, the outcomes of these interactions, as well as the resistance to certain activities. They base these findings on their own research on organisational discourse in refugee and nongovernmental organisation (NGO) settings in Canada, Denmark, Gaza, and the UK. Hardy (2001:44) argues that DA provides a way to “study such topics as the natural environment, globalization, identity, and the post-bureaucratic organisational forms, which are seen as fluid, contradictory, and ambiguous in their meaning”, and that DA also complements existing theories which “increases the theoretical plurality and diversity in the study of organizations” which in turn leads to new insights into organisational phenomena.

Similarly, Grant et al. (2001) describe a number of ways in which the study of organisational discourse can specifically contribute to the understanding of organisations: Firstly, a discursive approach assumes that discourse socially constructs reality and therefore allows us to determine how ideas are formulated and articulated among participants, and in turn shape and influence the behaviour within an organisation. It encourages the micro-level analysis of small selections of text while taking into account the macro-level social context. This illumination of day-to-day behaviour in socially constructed organisational life is of specific interest to critical discourse analysts with regards to investigating power relations and other management issues within the organisational context (2001:9). Furthermore, DA offers a unique perspective on organisational research due to the multi-disciplinary character of DA and the variety of texts and discourses that can be investigated through this method. To illustrate this point, consider the range of a few organisational topics that have been investigated through a discursive analysis lens: the role of language in organisational change (Ford and Ford, 1996); the construction of organisational strategy (Dunford and Jones, 2000); collective bargaining (Boje, 1995; Mumby, 1998); discourse and power in organisations (Phillips and Hardy, 1997); organisational learning<sup>7</sup> (Oswick et al., 2000c); the intrusion of accounting language into the linguistic repertoire of general business (Barber, 1997); a corpus-linguistic investigation of naturally occurring workplace discourse (Koester, 2006); the projection of corporate culture through mission statements (Swales and Rogers, 1995); and investigations of a range of communicative organisational genres and the use of language

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<sup>7</sup> Brown and Duguid (1991) support Lave and Wenger’s (1990) view of learning as a social construction, i.e. “putting knowledge back into the contexts in which it has meaning”, therefore organisational learning does not merely refer to learning in terms of training or courses, but to “learning-in-working” or learning in practice.

in professional settings (Bhatia, 1993; Yates and Orlikowski, 1992; Askehave and Swales, 2001). Studies from a CA perspective include Drew and Heritage's *Talk at work* (1992) and Arimen's (2005) study of institutional interaction at work. Sarangi and Roberts (1999) make a contribution to the literature from an ethnographic perspective and Bargilea-Chiappini (2009) from a business perspective.

In conclusion, organisational discourse offers an extensive variety of methodological approaches in support of alternative perspectives on OT, for example, narrative analysis, CDA, CA, SFL, metaphorical analysis, and communication theory (Grant et al., 2001:10-11). The topic of organisational genres will be discussed in more detail in section 3.3.

### **3.1.6 Challenges to organisational discourse methodological approaches**

Critiques against organisation discourse theory are not uncommon and the challenges of this approach to empirical research are often accentuated in the literature. Hardy (2001) identifies four challenges that face researchers when investigating organisational discourse: Firstly, selection (and justifying the selection) of texts for analysis is quite an intensive process as organisations produce a magnitude of different types of texts. Researchers should decide to what extent they want to relate their studies to other theoretical work, to "let the data drive the research" or to let the data "speak for itself" (Hardy, 2001:29). The latter approach is often criticised as being too far removed from the academic norm. Secondly, Hardy notes that finding the balance between text and context could also be a stumbling block. One school of thought is that when focusing solely on text, one fails to historicise the data (Van Dijk, 1997). The counter argument is that paying too much attention to the broader social context distracts from the particular text in question and privileges the interpretation of the data. Researchers therefore have to explore the relationship between text and context and determine to what extent these two aspects should be incorporated to make sense of their data in a justifiable academic fashion (Hardy 2001:30). The third challenge Hardy underlines is the ongoing debate regarding the role of structure and agency. This concerns the degree to which researchers believe that "material and social constructions are constrained or facilitated through discursive activity". Some researchers argue that discourses (and the social structures that they constitute) are too often portrayed as inescapable expressions of absolute control, and that the scope of individual resistance against such power is underrepresented. Others contest this view, arguing that, as fluid constructs, discourses are always subject to resistance (2001:31). The final challenge Hardy refers to involves *reflexivity*, which can be defined as

taking into consideration the ways in which the research was conducted and how this shaped the outcomes (Clegg and Hardy, 1996; Hardy, 2001). Hardy argues that reflexivity is an essential aspect of DA and that researchers should emphasise this aspect in their work (2001:33).

The latter obstacle to empirical research has specifically been taken into account in the present study as I acknowledge that the interview process played a defining role in shaping the texts used as data. A discussion on the role and the consequences of the researcher as interviewer will be presented in Chapter 4.

Other general criticisms against the postmodern study of organisational discourse include that it lacks a clear definition, and it often excludes other perspectives of organisations; it has also been accused of being an intellectual luxury with little marketable payoff, placing too much significance on “mere talk”, and, as discussed by Hardy (2001), it is often considered theoretically and methodologically challenged (Grant et al., 2001:12). These critiques are, however, contested by researchers who regard ODT as a highly insightful approach to organisational studies. Such views are discussed below.

## **3.2 Organisations as CofPs**

### **3.2.1 Introduction and background**

The term *community of practice* (CofP) was first introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991 in Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999) who defined the concept as follows:

An aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour. As a social construct, a CofP is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages.

More simply, CofPs are seen as “groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise...”, e.g. a group of nurses who meet for lunch once a week, a network of surgeons exploring certain techniques, or a group of engineers working on the same project (Wenger and Snyder, 2000:139). The concept of a CofP can be practically applied to a number of different contexts, e.g. in business, organisational design, education, government, professional associations, and civic life (Wenger, n.d). This concept

has recently been linked to linguistic research, as will also be done in this dissertation. Linguists are increasingly starting to consider CofP a useful concept for investigating discourse within organisational settings.

Wenger (1998a, 1998b, 2000) identifies three fundamental elements of a CofP:

- *Mutual engagement*: Members have a shared understanding of what their community is about. This understanding is maintained by regular interaction (e.g. chatting over a cup of tea, or meeting in a unit) which in turn establishes relationships.
- *Joint enterprise*: The enterprise refers not only to a shared goal or activity, but to a shared process in which members participate. This process requires a relationship of mutual accountability among members. The practice of the community is reflected by the members' own understanding of what is important as such communities develop around things that matter to people.
- *Shared repertoire*: CofP produce communal resources for negotiating meaning in certain contexts, e.g. specialised terminology, language, gestures, routines, tools, stories, and styles.

Wenger and Snyder (2000) postulate that members generally know when and if they should join; therefore membership is self-selected. Degrees of membership and participation differ within a CofP, as some participants can be classified as core members and others as peripheral members. Membership is determined by how successfully an individual has acquired the shared repertoire, or by his understanding of the processes and goals of the CofP (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999:176).

The boundaries of such a group are also vague as they are continually shifting: a CofP can exist within one organisational department, or may stretch to include members of other divisions or organisations (Wenger and Snyder, 2000:142-143). Wenger explains that although boundaries are typically seen as a source of separation, they should also be seen as areas of unusual learning “where perspectives meet and new possibilities arise” (2000:233).

Lave and Wenger (1991) originally used the concept of a CofP to refer to a theory of learning to describe a specific type of *social learning*<sup>8</sup> among members of a group. This application of the theory is not entirely inventive as it draws on ethnographic research on craft apprenticeship in earlier societies, e.g. metalworkers, potters and masons in Classical Greece, the Vai and Gola tailors in Liberia, and case studies of Yucatec midwives (Wenger and Snyder, 2000; Davies, 2005). These traditional communities had both social and business purposes, e.g. celebrating holidays together, worshipping the same deities, training apprentices, sharing knowledge, and spreading innovation (Wenger and Snyder, 2000:140). Earlier, apprenticeship was conceived of simply as “learning by doing”; however, researchers judged this description of learning as unsatisfactory as it offered very little in terms of illuminating the complex nature of situated learning<sup>9</sup> (Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson and Unwin, 2005:51). Investigation of the case studies mentioned above revealed that *legitimate peripheral participation* is a key concept of apprenticeship. Davies (2005:565) describes legitimate peripheral participation as allowing learners to participate in a limited way in actual practice, burdening them only with a partial amount of responsibility. They are thus considered to be “in an inbound trajectory, headed for full participation in the community of practice” (2005:565). These learners were gradually given more responsibility in order to increase their participation. They were thus allowed to make mistakes and gather information and advice from skilled members. Lave and Wenger (1991) adopted the view that CofPs are intertwined with situated learning, but expanded the scope of this concept:

In our view, learning is not merely situated in practice – as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world.

(Lave and Wenger, 1991:35)

They argue that knowing certain things is a matter of displaying certain competences defined in social communities, and such competences are constantly at interplay with personal experiences, and it is through this interplay that social learning takes place (Wenger, 2000:226). It is often suggested that such informal learning groups are of greater value than

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<sup>8</sup> Social learning considers the setting in which learning is accomplished, thus emphasising the “ambient social and physical circumstances and the histories and social relations of the people involved” (Brown and Duguid, 1991:47).

<sup>9</sup> Lave (1991:64) defines situated learning as “ a social phenomenon constituted in the experienced, lived-in world, through legitimate peripheral participation in on-going social practice, the process of changing knowledgeable skill is subsumed in processes of changing identity in and through membership in a community of practitioners; and mastery is an organizational, relational characteristic of communities of practice.”

formal systematic learning (Boud and Middleton, 2003). Wenger and Snyder (2000:139) see a CofP as a new organisational form that stimulates knowledge sharing, learning and change. They argue that knowledge is the primary output of such a community; thus in a CofP, social learning is inevitable as experience and knowledge are constantly shared in free-flowing and creative ways, and a CofP continually renews itself as knowledge is generated (2000:140,143). Wenger poses that “the knowledge of an organization lives in a constellation of communities of practice each taking care of a specific aspect of the competence that the organization needs ... they retain knowledge in living ways, unlike a database or a manual... for this reason they are ideal for initiating newcomers into a practice” (Wenger, 1998b).

Wenger identifies three modes of belonging to a CofP as a social learning group:

- *Engagement*: Doing things together, for example talking to or helping a colleague.
- *Imagination*: Constructing an image of oneself, of the community, and of the world.
- *Alignment*: Coordinating perspectives, interpretations and actions.

Other advantages of CofPs in organisations include improving organisational performance, helping to drive strategy, functioning as “knowledge banks” rich in high quality information, enhancing problem solving processes, and allowing for the further development of members’ personal skills (Wenger and Snyder, 2000:140-141).

CofP should not be confused with typical structured work groups or teams within a corporate institute. Prominent characteristics of CofPs are that even though they often exist within large organisations, they are rather informal and spontaneous, they arise naturally, they organise themselves, and often members may not even be aware of the existence of the CofP that they belong to (Roberts, 2006:625). Managers cannot mandate such communities as they are resistant to supervision and interference. The lifespan of a CofP depends on how long it is valued by the community, and cannot be terminated due to an organisation’s schedule. Wenger claims that a CofP needs to be nurtured to a certain extent, and that internal leadership is necessary to sustain the CofP. Internal leadership is often diverse and distributed and not governed by one single person (Wenger, 1998b).

### 3.2.2 The notion of *CofP* in linguistic studies

Scholarly contributions by Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999) and Davies (2005) will briefly be discussed as they are relevant to the current study. Both present arguments as to why the notion of *CofP*, rather than the notions of *speech community* and *social network*, is of particular relevance to linguistic studies (specifically, sociolinguistic studies).

Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999:173-175) set out to justify why the term “CofP” should be added to linguistic studies. They argue that the notion of a CofP “takes us further toward our goal of understanding the constraints on natural language variation” as linguists may find it a useful tool to investigate linguistic styles, language structure, discourse, and interaction patterns within certain groups.

They argue that the CofP framework is better suited to linguistic studies (especially within the business context) than *social networks* as the latter is defined by weak ties among people who have limited contact, and a CofP is defined by the nature of the contact between members; thus social networks are more concerned with the quantity of interaction, and CofPs with the quality of interaction among participants (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999:179-180).

Although fairly similar, the greatest difference between a speech community and a CofP is that in a speech community membership is often externally defined, and a lack of shared goals and practices is evident. A speech community can instead be characterised by a shared set of norms and a way of being, with little focus on individual and group identities (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999:179).

According to Davies (2005) the notion of a CofP is useful when examining human nature as it emphasises social action, and also offers a unique lens through which to investigate linguistic variation and the formation of identities within communities bound by practice. Davies explains that “like other practices, linguistic practice differs according to an individual’s identification ...” (2005:575). In Davies’ opinion, the concept of a CofP still needs some development in order to become more explanatory than descriptive, but she agrees that the CofP framework certainly has yielded “new insights into the ways in which language and other behaviours index social identity and patterns of variation” (2005:577). (The issue of identity is addressed in section 3.2.4 below.)

### 3.2.3 Studies investigating CofPs

The concept of CofP was first introduced into sociolinguistics by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) to investigate linguistic variation related to gender among American high school students (in Davies, 2005). The focus of their study was on the presentation and interpretation of identities within a CofP by means of, for example, phonological preferences. Their work emphasises that gender cannot be understood simply in terms of individual attributes, and is instead constructed within a variety of social practices by members of communities (1992:484). They argue that “language is a key symbolic and communicative resource, central to developing the ways of thinking and doing that give communities of practice their character” (1992:483).

Holmes (2005) investigated leadership talk within a CofP, also questioning the relationship between language and gender. The purpose of her research was to determine how mentoring is done within the workplace by looking at linguistic strategies used to advise, guide, give corrective comments, and offer support and indirect coaching. She explains that when researching leadership, a person’s communication skills should be taken into account as it is of vital importance for effective leadership. Leadership is described as an interactional activity or process between two or more people. Although mentoring has traditionally been associated with men, research within the workplace has shown that women are now also doing mentoring with the only difference being that they use more “feminine strategies” as opposed to men. Holmes remarks that women are redefining what it means to be a leader and are introducing a wide range of “feminine” discursive strategies to the image of efficient leadership (2005:1798).

Schnurr, Marra and Holmes (2006) make use of the concept of a CofP to investigate cultural diversity within the workplace, specifically focusing on politeness and leadership within ethnicised communities, where “ethnicised” refers to multicultural communities made up of members of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (in this study, specifically Maori and Pākehā leaders in New Zealand workplaces). The purpose of their research is not to emphasise intercultural differences, but rather to investigate how politeness and leadership are accomplished within specific workplaces and communities. They demonstrate that what one organisation may classify as appropriate behaviour, may be perceived as impolite within another organisational context. The specific linguistic data used in their research include

transcriptions of opening sequences of meetings, and humour in the workplace. They argue that workplaces construct their own norms and mannerisms with regards to expressing politeness as a result of negotiations among members of a CofP.

Outside of the linguistic sphere, CofP theory is frequently incorporated in knowledge management, boundary management, business communication, and informal learning research. Hildreth, Kimble and Wright (2000) explored how Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of CofP may translate to dispersed intercontinental settings. The particular focus of their work is on knowledge management within expanded communities, specifically exploring the functioning of CofPs across international boundaries (2000:27). They found that CofPs need to be supported by organisations in order for knowledge transfer to successfully take place, also that communities are likely to evolve more quickly in the presence of face-to-face interactions. Brown and Duguid (2001) explored the concepts of learning and knowledge within organisations from a social-practice perspective. They argue that studies using the CofP framework within organisations too often focus merely on "community" and neglect the investigation of "practice", which creates epistemic differences and barriers between communities (2001:198-199). They support the notion that a CofP is indeed a useful concept for organisational study as CofPs are "privileged sites for insight, problem identification, learning, and knowledge production". However, they suggest that a greater effort should be made to link the concepts of community and practice, equally incorporating both concepts in investigations (2001:202). They found that internal divisions undoubtedly exist within firms, consequently challenging traditional views of homogeneity within business organisations, and that knowledge is not organisational property that falls within its boundaries, but that it is embedded in broader structures (2001:209). Similarly, Carlile (2002:442) explored the relation between knowledge and boundaries within a CofP from a pragmatic perspective, also finding that knowledge creates barriers, whilst simultaneously functioning as a source of innovation. He argues that, from a pragmatic point of view, differences in knowledge are not necessarily founded in different degrees of interpretation, but that such differences are localised, embedded, and invested in practice (2002:453). Knowledge thus holds different representational capacities within different CofPs (2002:254). Carlile's research subsequently demonstrates that communication across boundaries is often problematic based on the nature and representational value of the knowledge in different practices.

### 3.2.4 CofP: Discourses and identity

Wenger sees CofPs as places of negotiation, learning, and meaning and identity construction through interaction (1998a:58). There has been a notable increase in linguistic investigations into the mutual construction of identities within a CofP.

The discourses produced by CofPs refer to the “existence of a common language that allows people to communicate and negotiate meanings across boundaries” (Wenger, 2000:236). This allows researchers as outsiders to determine what is of importance to a specific community, and how identities within communities are constructed by participants in a certain group. Wenger (1998a, 2000) refers to doing research on claims processors in an insurance company, where he discovered that their “knowing was interwoven in profound ways with their identities as participants in a community of practice” – as their jobs were of a lower status, they consciously tried not to be too interested in matters that were not directly relevant to them, and also did not like to reveal that they knew more than what was expected of them, as if knowing too much would have been a “betrayal of their sense of self and their community.”

We define ourselves by what we are not as well as by what we are, by the communities we do not belong to as well as by the ones we do. These relationships change. We move from community to community. In doing so, we carry a bit of each as we go around. Our identities are not something we can turn on and off. You don't cease to be a parent because you go to work. You don't cease to be a nurse because you step out of the hospital. Multimembership is an inherent aspect of our identities.

(Wenger, 2000:239)

The issue of identity in the workplace has been further investigated by Holmes and Riddiford (n.d.) with specific regard to the construction of professional identity among migrants from different cultural backgrounds. They emphasise the fact that identity management within an organisation is not an easy task. Effectively adapting to culturally different organisations, identity management and accomplishing effective workplace communication entails specific socio-pragmatic skills and an understanding of culturally different communication styles. Holmes and Riddiford also comment on the expectation that newcomers should be submissive when they join a new company, regardless of their skills. This may not only be true for newcomers within a company, but also within a CofP. This raises the question of how

power is distributed within organisations in general, and more specifically, within a CofP. This question will be further discussed in the section below<sup>10</sup>.

### **3.2.5 Critiques levelled against the concept of CofP**

Boud and Middleton (2003) argue that the notion of CofP is rather limited. They found that informal learning is achieved through a variety of networks – some similar to what Wenger describes as a CofP, and others not. They found that learning also occurred in groups that cannot be labelled as a CofP because of differences in practice, lack of mutual activities, and different views with regards to valuing a specific group identity. In some groups they found that learning was even possible through virtual networks. They conclude that learning potential differs from one situation to the next, depending on the work itself and the structure of relationships: “some learning networks manifest features of communities of practice, but others do not strongly build identity and meaning” (2003:202). Fuller et al. (2005:65) are in support of this view and state that “Lave and Wenger’s attempt to stretch legitimate peripheral participation to cover all workplace learning is unconvincing”. They argue that formal teaching is too easily dismissed in earlier CofP literature.

Roberts (2006) questions certain difficulties and issues related to the CofP approach, such as power, trust, and predispositions. I will also discuss further challenges presented by Roberts, namely the size and spatial reach of CofP, as it is an issue central to my research.

Roberts (2006: 626) defines power as the “ability or capacity to achieve something, whether by influence, force, or control”. The critique against Wenger’s CofP is that power distributions within an organisation surely must have some kind of influence in a CofP. It is plausible that the members within such a CofP vary in terms of, amongst other things, age, experience, authority and expertise. As mentioned earlier, it should also be noted that some members enjoy full membership and participation within a CofP, while others are on the peripheries. Therefore it is fair to assume that some members may have more power in the negotiation of meaning within a CofP than others (2006:627). Subsequently, Roberts argues that the degree of trust among members will also be influenced by the specific distribution of power within a CofP, as power shapes social interaction. Fuller et al. (2005) found that power is a determining factor in relation to the control and organisation of work, the creation or

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<sup>10</sup> For a more in-depth discussion on identity, impression management, and self-presentation through discourse within the multicultural workplace, refer to Bilbow (1997).

elimination of boundaries, and the opportunity to learn. A related unaddressed issue is raised by Yanow (in Roberts, 2006) concerning the possibility that some members may have much more power within a CofP based on knowledge, than their position in the organisational hierarchy recognises. Lave and Wenger (1991) acknowledge that power may have some influence in terms of legitimacy of participants, but an exploration of the implications of such power is lacking in their work<sup>11</sup>.

The view of meaning being negotiated within a CofP is challenged by Bourdieu's notion of habitus, which refers to "modes of thought that are unconsciously acquired, resistant to change, and transferable between different contexts" (Roberts, 2006:629). This notion is in direct contrast with the idea that a CofP continually changes through practice and newly acquired knowledge. Roberts argues that meaning is often predetermined by individuals' preferences and predispositions. Therefore communities will eventually also develop such modes of thought that will prohibit or hinder the incorporation of new knowledge within their practices (2006:629). I will return to the matter of set ways of thinking in the discussion following the data analysis.

Davies (2005: 566) argues that membership is not a mere choice, as claimed by Wenger and Snyder (2000), and that legitimacy of participation is instead sanctioned by the hierarchy within the CofP through a process of gatekeeping – some individuals are allowed to fully participate whereas others remain peripheral. Gatekeeping involves monitoring boundaries and is often achieved through discourse. Previous research on gatekeeping focused mainly on powerful actions taken to monitor access to organisations or institutions (Karen, 1990; Button, 1992; Drew and Heritage, 1992; Iedema, 1997). Karen (1990:227) defines gatekeeping as "the process of developing and implementing criteria and practices that yield access to scarce resources." He explains that in the business context, for example, it means that employers want to hire individuals who will in some way augment profits. The criteria for selecting employees thus reflect and support the employer's goal. Schiffrin (1994) also places the gatekeeper at the entryway to an institution, explaining that gatekeeping is an asymmetric speech encounter in which an insider seeks certain information from an outsider in order to decide whether or not to grant the person access to the institution. Holmes (2007)

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<sup>11</sup> The participants in the present study are from a variety of management and employment levels, and during the analysis of the data each participant's position was documented, acknowledged and considered in terms of power.

suggests that gatekeeping is done on a daily basis in less obvious ways on a smaller scale within teams or CofPs within organisations. She investigated the subtle ways in which gatekeeping is accomplished in a large business corporation in New Zealand and found that people constantly identify, construct and maintain boundaries through gatekeeping in normal everyday workplace talk. Examples of “doing gatekeeping” include joking about a new member’s outsider status, and mentoring between a supervisor and a subordinate (i.e. providing guidance and support, and encouraging development in order to promote career advancement).

Membership is thus not just bound by practice, but by acceptance which in turn allows for participation. Davies (2005:567) makes the point that merely being tolerated on the peripheries does not necessarily lead to a learning experience, and that learning optimally occurs when members are legitimately participating in the CofP. It is also argued that Lave and Wenger (1991) do not provide a clear distinction between peripherality and marginality<sup>12</sup> which could be quite confusing as entry to a CofP is not formally coded in terms of training or qualifications (Davies, 2005:565).

The last issue to be addressed in this section is size and spatial reach. Although it is often argued that a CofP is not determined by membership, but by practice, the issue of membership cannot be entirely dismissed (Davies, 2005). Wenger (in Roberts, 2006) applies the concept of CofP to a variety of organisational contexts and identifies some as having large memberships. He refers to one group of more than 1 500 members globally. Roberts questions if one could actually apply the same principles of a smaller CofP to one with such great membership as there surely is a difference in terms of interaction and relationships among members. She emphasises the idea that large communities can be seen as a collection of smaller CofPs which arise from boundary processes (Wenger, 1998b). Wenger explains that knowledge and information can travel across boundaries, along with styles and discourses. In this sense, CofPs are part of “constellations of practice” (Wenger, 1998a, 1998b, 2000). As mentioned above, these boundaries are fluid and continually shifting, and therefore difficult to determine. Roberts argues that CofPs need to be differentiated in terms

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<sup>12</sup> *Peripheral participation* means that an individual is granted partial participation, as he or she is given an opportunity to learn and to eventually become a full participant. From Lave and Wenger’s lacking clarification of marginal participation, it is assumed that *marginal participants* are not given the same opportunity to learn and do not have the same access to the information held by the group, thus keeping them at a distance and prohibiting them from becoming full participants.

of size and spatial reach as it is not possible to apply the concept fully beyond certain limits. She poses that certain features of a CofP may remain static, while others may be sensitive to the range of membership (2006:632).

### **3.3 Communicative practices as *genres* in organisations**

Zachary (2000:95) notes that there has been an upsurge in genre-based research within the business context since the 1980s. This led him to the assumption that “there is something particularly productive about the idea of genre” and inspired him to trace the development of genre-theory in business communication, to explore the possible business-related reasons why researches are drawn to genre-studies, and to make suggestions for further research.

As genre-based studies became progressively popular in business research, the field of interest developed (parallel to genre-studies in the linguistic domain) from an over-simplified focus on formulaic structure to a complex relation between form and action associated with text (2000:96). A more recent focal point is investigating different types of routine communication in an attempt to identify what makes them similar, and how they can be differentiated.

Zachary (2000:99) argues that a genre-based approach has the potential to enlarge the scope of business communication research beyond the conventional focus on the micro-level or macro-level. He describes a micro-level approach as too limiting as it only focuses on individual practices or text. He critiques a macro-level approach as researchers seem to get caught up in the difficulties of defining context. He offers a genre-based approach as an intermediate level solution to the above mentioned issues as this approach allows researchers to scrutinise the patterns of communication as well as the actual work that texts do to define organisations. A genre-based approach also provides a deeper understanding of how textual rituals sustain organisations (2000:98-99).

A number of organisational genres exist, e.g. recommendation letters, proposals, job interviews, and meetings (Yates and Orlikowski, 1992:301-302). As the focus of this dissertation is restricted to spoken genres, the discussion below will be limited to verbal exchanges within business organisations. Koester (2006:32-33) examined 30 hours of workplace talk which allowed him to broadly identify a number of *spoken* organisational

genres. Five unidirectional and three collaborative discourse genres were identified, each of which can be divided into a number of sub-genres. Unidirectional discourses include briefing, service encounter, procedural and directive discourse, requesting information / permission / goods, and reporting. Collaborative discourses include making arrangements, decision making, and discussing and evaluating.

PA will be regarded as a broad organisational genre, encompassing a number of both written and spoken sub-genres. As sub-genres of PAs, PAIs fall into the category of *discussing and evaluating*.

### **3.3.1 PAs as organisational genres**

The purpose of this section is not necessarily to present an exhaustive literature review of past PA research, but rather to explicate the appeal of the topic to linguistics in general and, more specifically, to discourse analysts. In order to continue with this discussion, the concept of PA will first be clarified in terms of definition, situated practice, function/purpose, and form and content. A concise summary of scholarly work on the topic will be presented, followed by notes on PA studies in the South African context. The link between linguistics and PA as topic of interest will then be addressed.

#### **3.3.1.1 PA as situated practice**

Terms such as *performance review*, *performance discussion*, *annual appraisal*, *performance evaluation*, *performance assessment*, *employee evaluation* and *merit evaluation* are often used to describe the same process of evaluating and providing feedback to employees on their performance – what is referred to as “PA” (performance appraisal/assessment) in this dissertation (see footnote 1). PA can be defined as “the ongoing process of evaluating and managing both the behaviour and outcomes in the workplace” (Grobler, Wärmich, Carrell, Elbert and Hatfield, 2002). Asmuß (2008:409) defines PAIs as “recurrent strategic interviews between a superior in an organisation and an employee that focus on employee performance and development.” PAIs are thus an integral spoken sub-genre situated in the greater organisational process of PAs. Employees are often assessed based on three types of performance:

- *Trait-based criteria* (e.g. personal characteristics such as loyalty, communication skills, and dependability).

- *Behaviour-based criteria* (behaviour specific to job success, e.g. the ability to work well in a team).
- *Outcome-based criteria* (here the focus is on which goals or achievements have been reached and not on *how* this was accomplished). (Grobler et al., 2002:260-263)

The criteria mentioned above consequently influence the day-to-day behaviour of employees, and contribute to how certain tasks are performed within business organisations. Knowledge of the criteria above may, for example, ideally compel individuals to actively participate in group tasks, to build personal relationships with managers and co-workers, and to freely discuss their performance concerns or desire for guidance or training.

Even though these processes are often regarded as “unpleasant and time-consuming” they are seen as the only human resources (HR) programmes that can achieve certain objectives (Grobler et al., 2002:236). These objectives can be of an evaluative or of a developmental nature. Evaluative objectives involve looking at past performance and are commonly linked to compensation (increases and bonuses). Developmental objectives, on the other hand, focus on future performance in the sense of developing employee skills or motivation.

### **3.3.2 The function of PAs**

Townley (1997) recommends the PA as a very important managerial tool as it is concerned with individual effort, reward and effectiveness. Grobler et al. (2002) support this view. They add that feedback on performance is a primary organisational need as all employees want to know how they, or their performances, are perceived by their supervisors. This newly acquired awareness generally leads to a personal desire to improve, which in turn leads to better performance and may result in future career moves. A broader perspective is that the results of PAs may indicate if and where training is required within an organisation (2002:267). Sherman, Bohlander and Snell (1998) argue that PAs are also useful to evaluate organisational policies and practices (e.g. insufficient attention to an employee or inadequate communication), or to discover if an employee has personal problems (e.g. depression or low work ethic) or job concerns (e.g. boredom, excessive work load or lack of skills). Asmuß (2008) concurs that PAs are crucial to internal communication within organisations. The greatest concerns concerning PAs are the infrequency of PAIs, the lack of feedback to

employees, and insufficient training provided for managers to cope with such sensitive encounters (Cederblom, 1982).

### **3.3.2.1 Employee empowerment as a function of PAs**

A recent PA study within South Africa is Sutherland, De Bruin and Crous's (2007) work on the relation between employee empowerment and employee performance. Defining the newly emerged concept of *employee empowerment* has proven to be a difficult task as it is quite problematic to offer a universal description incorporating the sense of satisfaction of what exactly it is that is gained at individual and organisational level (Sharma and Kaur, 2011). Some suggest that empowerment can only be defined in terms of what precisely it is that a specific organisation aims to implement (Argyris in Sutherland et al., 2007). Most definitions offered to explicate this concept encompass factors such as providing the employee with latitude, authority and discretion with regards to task- and context-related activities (Melhem in Sutherland et al., 2007). Liden and Arad (in Sutherland et al., 2007:62) argue that employee empowerment should firstly be defined in terms of organisational structures and policies (macro-perspective) in order to determine what constitutes an empowerment climate within an organisation, e.g. information sharing, team accountability, and/or promoting autonomy through goal setting. Thereafter, a micro-perspective should be offered focusing on empowerment as an intrinsic motivator with special attention to what an individual should ideally feel to be considered an empowered employee (2007:62).

Employee empowerment has been identified as a prominent situational factor in organisational research (Sutherland et al., 2007:61). This concept is customarily viewed as a motivational construct from an employee psychology perspective (Spreitzer, 1995), and has been linked to employee performance (Liden, Wayne and Sparrow, 2000; Sutherland, et al., 2007), as well as larger scale organisational effectiveness (Sharma and Kaur, 2011). The psychological perspective on employee empowerment was conceptualised by Thomas and Velthouse (1990). Together, they devised the Empowerment Model which consists of four cognitions: a sense of meaning (the value attributed to one's work), competence (being confident in one's own abilities), self-determination (one's belief in autonomy and control with regards to performing tasks), and impact (influencing organisational outcomes through one's individual contributions).

Empowerment is hypothesised to have an effect on an employees' task performance as well as on what Gelatty and Irving (2001, in Sutherland et al., 2007:62) refer to as contextual performance. Contextual performance involves activities that the employees are not necessarily contracted to do, but that still have an impact on organisational achievement. Such tasks are usually performed by volunteering or a demonstration of additional effort by an employee. Due to the nature of such tasks, they are not usually evaluated by standardised PA tools (Sutherland et al., 2007:60-61).

International literature on the topic of employee empowerment led Sutherland et al. (2007) to hypothesise that the level of empowerment an employee experiences, combined with the specific empowerment climate of an organisation, may influence employees' conscientious behaviour, in turn influencing their performance outcomes – therefore employees who are highly empowered should receive favourable performance ratings. However, in their study on empowerment and performance in the South African workplace, they found that high levels of employee empowerment were only marginally reflected in performance ratings. One should note, however, that the objectivity in the ratings used in their study is questionable due to the use of a one-sided measuring instrument – only managers' ratings were taken into account; employee self-ratings and peer-ratings were excluded from their study. They contend that in spite of only detecting a weak connection between empowerment and performance, their findings still suggest that very high and very low levels of empowerment may both have a negative effect on performance outcomes (as explained further on), illustrating the complex relation between performance and empowerment. They suggest that an optimal level of empowerment should be reached, complementing the employee's personality. Therefore, employee empowerment may not be standardly rateable across employees and across organisations. It is suggested that empowerment enhancement strategies should be tailored individually for optimum performance.

Sharma and Kaur (2011) argue that organisations are not as actively involved in creating a climate of empowerment as they should be as many deem employee empowerment to be more of an individual concern. They argue that formal and informal systemic structures (e.g. job discretion, flexibility, creativity, recognition, goal-setting and achieving, employee networking and interpersonal relationships) are key to workplace empowerment (2011:106). Sharma and Kaur (2011:107) introduce the notion of *empowerment antecedents*, i.e. “pre-requisites that facilitate and encourage empowerment efforts.”

The antecedents most relevant to the present study are the following:

- Rewards and incentives, based on individual performance outcomes.
- Skills and knowledge, a lack of which should be identified by management and addressed in PAs, establishing a need for and offering further training.
- Self-esteem (feelings of self-worth and belonging) and locus of control<sup>13</sup>.
- Information and communication resources – organisations should be conscious of making more information available in order to create an environment of empowerment.
- Autonomy.

These prerequisites clearly illustrate that organisations should be at the forefront in facilitating employee empowerment and that empowerment can no longer be viewed as a “functional style” to be enjoyed by management alone (Sharma and Kaur, 2011:107). In their study conducted in the context of public and private sector banks in India, Sharma and Kaur’s data support the arguments that these antecedents are controllable by organisations and imperative in linking psychological (employee) empowerment and structural empowerment, which in turn leads to greater organisational effectiveness (2011:118).

Recent studies reveal contradictory findings of the effects of employee empowerment (Varca 2001; Rafiq and Ahmed, 1998). HR specialists warn that very high levels of empowerment may cause employees to take on extra responsibilities which may result in an overall lack of productivity (Chan and Lam, 2011:610). Popular literature, such as management websites also indicate that employee empowerment could lead to behavioural issues such as egotism ([www.managementstudyguide.com](http://www.managementstudyguide.com)). Chan and Lam (2011:613) argue that employee empowerment creates an agency struggle between managers and employees, but that an appropriate PA system can control these agency issues as it serves to curb agent-opportunism and keep self-serving agents (employees) in check. PAs should thus be used to refocus the employee on supporting the principal (the supervisor), mitigating the potential negative impact of employee empowerment.

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<sup>13</sup> Spreitzer (1995) found that individuals with a greater sense of self-esteem are more likely to actively participate in the workplace, and that individuals with a locus of control (i.e. a perceived sense of responsibility for his/her behaviour/control over what happens in the workplace) feel more capable of shaping their work-environments, which leads them to enjoy a greater sense of empowerment.

### 3.3.3 Form and content of PAs

PA became a popular research topic in the 1960s and 1970s. Early scholarly work focused on topics pertaining to factors influencing successful PAIs, e.g. the structuring/format of the interview, its function, frequency (Cederblom, 1982), degree of subordinate participation and self-appraisal (Silverman and Wexley, 1984; Roberson et al., 1993), the relationship between participants (Roberson et al., 1993), manager behaviour (Cederblom, 1982; Greller, 1998) and context (Cederblom, 1982; Klein and Snell, 1994; Greller, 1998). These factors were generally measured by participant satisfaction and improved performance. A number of inconsistencies exist in the literature mentioned above, providing evidence for the belief that there is no single “correct” strategy to go about performing PAs, and that, instead, PAIs need to be tailor made for different circumstances (Klein and Snell, 1994). A more recent approach to PA research shifts the focus from strategic aims, interview design, and outcomes, to how PAIs are actually executed in the moment (Asmuß, 2008).

From very early on it was realised that if efficiently designed and successfully implemented, PAIs could have great benefits for organisations as they provide a platform for counselling, mentoring, evaluation, feedback, discussion, goal setting, and development (Cederblom, 1982). However, the existing scholarly research depicts PAs as largely problematic areas of organisational discourse and claims that the ideals of the PA processes are often hindered by a number of contextual and/or organisational factors which are briefly discussed below.

Cederblom (1982) argues that it is feasible to assume that the function of PAIs certainly affects their structure and outcomes. Some researchers (Meyer et al., 1965; Silverman and Wexley, 1984) are in favour of the idea of a split interview – i.e. that separate interviews be conducted. One interview should focus on issues concerned with evaluation and feedback, while the other should focus on counselling and development. They argue that a joint interview is less effective as it forces the manager into the conflicting roles of counsellor and judge, and that these mismatched identities could lead to employee defensiveness, which in turn might hinder improved post-interview performance. The notion of the split interview is contested by Cummings (1973). He argues that PAIs are more effective when salaries and development are discussed in a single interview as the idea of rewards (salaries and/or promotions) is motivating in itself. Cederblom (1982) reviews both cases, concludes that the

question of joint or separate interviews remains unresolved, and hence encourages further research on the matter.

In later research, Cummings and Schwarb (in Cederblom, 1982) suggest that a set format for conducting PAIs is only of value to a limited number of employees and that different PA systems should be designed for different groups based on the intended contents and the desired outcomes of the PAIs. They explain their premise by looking at goal-setting as a standard element of the PAI. Goal-setting is mostly associated with positive interview outcomes as it is correlated with employee satisfaction, perceived fairness and accuracy, and a greater mutual understanding (Landy et al. in Cederblom, 1982). However, goal-setting is a more appropriate endeavour in some jobs than in others. It can only be a meaningful point of discussion if employees have a certain amount of responsibility or have challenging jobs, as opposed to steady routine jobs (1982:221,223). Cummings and Schwarb propose developmental appraisals for high performing, high potential employees, and maintenance appraisals for steady and satisfactory performers who are not likely to show improved performance due to the nature of their work, or other constraints. This recommendation is criticised on the basis that although some employees may have reached their developmental limits and would find goal-setting a waste of time, it seems “callous toward possibilities of employee development” (1982:221). Keeley (in Cederblom, 1982) poses that the appropriate method of PAI is determined by organisational structure and the nature of the job.

It is argued that, just like the format of PAIs, the frequency with which PAIs are conducted is also determined by the function(s) of the interview. Research has shown that 90% of 150 industrial and government organisations in the USA conduct PAs at least annually (Minor in Cederblom, 1982). Initially, academics typically advocated that it would be more beneficial to conduct PAIs on a more frequent basis as this was assumed to result in more accurate and fair evaluations (Klein and Snell, 1994). However, research has shown that the frequency with which PAIs are conducted should be determined by the specific function(s) of the PAI, the nature of the employee’s job, and the personality of the employee. It is also reasonable to assume that new employees may need guidance on a more regular basis than employees who have already been working in the company for a longer time. Researchers warn that an excessive number of PAIs in a given period may lead to employee defensiveness and could become emotionally straining for both parties involved (Cederblom, 1982).

Factors influencing the structure of the PAI include employee participation, manager behaviour, and the relationship between the two participants. Participation in the PAI requires that the employee is “encouraged to share ideas, discuss problems, and help determine the issues to be addressed” (Greller, 1998:1062). Black and Gregersen (in Greller, 1998) add that employee participation includes opportunities for both participants to identify causes of problems, to discuss possible solutions and to determine a course of action. Greller argues that participation is greatly associated with positive review outcomes such as employee satisfaction, a greater understanding of performance goals, and a reinforcement of the relationship between the manager and the employee. The level of participation usually depends on the degree of threat that it poses to the employee, as well as the relationship between the employee and the manager. Basset and Meier, and French et al. (both in Cederblom, 1982) maintain that participation results in positive outcomes if the perceived level of threat is low. Their studies also demonstrate that participation is a result of the relationship between the participants – if an employee is unaccustomed to frequent interaction with the manager, forced participation may have negative outcomes. Correspondingly, if an employee is used to having an informal relationship with a manager, it may also have a negative impact when the manager suddenly assumes a more formal interactional style to conduct the PAI (1982:224). The employee’s level of experience and need for independence may also have an impact on his/her willingness and ability to meaningfully contribute to the PAI (1982:225).

Self-Appraisal (SA) methods have been introduced to improve employee participation in PAIs and to make the exercise more meaningful. These methods have been widely advocated due to their potential benefits for developmental and administrative assessments. SAs entail that employees evaluate their own performance before participating in the PAI with the manager (Roberson et al., 1993). SA has been commonly associated with positive interview outcomes as it is hypothesised that SA leads to greater employee participation, more direct feedback, perceptions of fairness, employee satisfaction, improved communication between managers and employees, a better understanding of expectations, reduced ambiguity, and a motivation to improve performance (Roberson et al., 1993). It should be noted, however, that these correlations were mostly regarded as “intuitively plausible” and had not been based on experimental research prior to a study done by Roberson et al. (1993:130). This study found that these expected benefits depend on certain variables, e.g. the relationship between the manager and employee, the experience of the employee, the regularity of contact with each

other, the formality of the interview, and the exact purpose of the interview. It was established that SA could even lead to negative outcomes; for example, that SA may inflate the employee's confidence so that he/she will be more likely to reject a lower rating from a manager, which could create friction (1993:139). This study reminds researchers not to ignore the effect of context on results. It argues for further research in order to gain a better understanding of the effects of SA in a variety of settings, as well as the use of different SA methods.

The manager's role in a PAI is just as important as the employee's efforts to participate. Cederblom (1982) finds that managers' support is constantly related to positive interview outcomes and advises that managers should be knowledgeable about what exactly the employee's job entails in order to be supportive by manner of providing guidance, constructive criticism, and praise. Previously, managers have been trained to increase employee participation by allowing the employee to talk more, to help set the agenda for the meeting, and to assist in constructing future plans. They have also been taught to engage in active listening. These recommendations are often passed on as "common wisdom" and have little concern for the influence of individual employee characteristics or the specific context of the PAI (Greller, 1998:1062). Greller's critique against such training programs is that they offer a limited behavioural range at best: research has found that managers become comfortable with a set method or style of conducting PAIs and rarely adapt their behaviour to meet individual and situational employee needs. Cederblom supports Greller's view and argues that training is needed to plan PAIs for different situations, and that more research should be conducted specifically in the field of PA training for managers (1982:226).

Cederblom's review of scholarly work from 1957 to 1980 leads him to conclude that "a situational approach be used for designing and conducting appraisal interviews" as a set method of approaching PAs may lead to unrealistic expectations and negative outcomes (1982:226). He explains that situational expectations may be more appropriate and that the PAI should be more than just a routine exercise. Klein and Snell are in agreement and pose that different approaches may be more or less suited to different contexts and that PAIs should be specifically designed keeping in mind the "function, frequency and type of feedback to be given" (1994:160). They argue that the inconsistencies in earlier research are due to a disregard for the settings in which they were conducted. Another reason for the inconsistent results of previous studies is that they isolated and investigated one aspect of the

PAI instead of considering a combination of variables in relation to one another within a given environment. They conclude that there is “no one best way” to conduct PAIs and that the effectiveness of a PAI would “be a function of using the right procedures in the proper situation or context” (1994:168).

### **3.3.4 PA issues in South Africa**

Compared to the USA and UK, very little has been published on the subject of PAs in South Africa. Grobler et al. (2002) report on a survey conducted by the University of Stellenbosch Business School among nine leading South African organisations (Spangenberg, 1993). The aim of the study was to determine how performance is managed and rewarded in South Africa. The results of the study led to identifying major problems that companies have with managing employee performance. The first major problem is the existence of a negative work culture, and the second is that changes in corporate strategy were not reflected in employees’ behaviour. An additional concern is the lack of line management support for performance management. With regards to formal PAs, specific issues came to light: follow-up performance reviews were lacking; performance information and objectivity were inadequate; and there was an “over-emphasis on the appraisal aspect at the expense of development” (in Grobler et al., 2002:260). A related study showed that a majority of companies in South Africa did not have a performance management system in place at all (Renton, 2000).

These findings led Spangenberg (1994) to argue for a move away from PAs to performance management. He claims that PAs are replete with flaws and false assumptions which lead to a general dissatisfaction among employees. He poses that prior research has repeatedly emphasised issues such as rating errors and cognitive issues in attempts to highlight how inadequate the system is. He observes that this kind of traditional literature has been overly preoccupied with identifying problems, and has done very little to advise on what can be done to create a successful PA system.

Very briefly, *performance management* is a “much wider concept than performance appraisal and comprises a set of techniques used by a manager to plan, direct and improve the performance of subordinates in line with achieving the overall objective of the organization” (Spangenberg, 1994:14). Such a system typically consists of four stages: performance planning, managing, reviewing, and rewarding performance.

Spangenberg (1994) divides PA problems into four categories:

- *Context* (organisational characteristics, e.g. no emphasis on importance of PA, no commitment to PA, inopportunity for employee participation).
- *System characteristics* (e.g. incorrect implementation of PA and PA policies, lack of objectivity).
- *PA elements* (e.g. faulty rating scales, differing expectations, inadequate observation, lack of knowledge of employee's job, ambiguous performance measures, outdated systems).
- *PA outcomes* (e.g. failure in terms of evaluation, guidance, motivation).

Spangenberg focuses on the situational and organisational factors related to PAs in terms of scrutinising traditional PA assumptions. He summarises the undesirable effects of PAs, as opposed to the more desirable effects of performance management, as follows:

- PAs confound people with the system.
- PAs destroy teamwork.
- PAs foster mediocrity (due to goal attainment instead of goal setting).
- PAs focus on the short term.
- PAs increase variability.
- PAs destroy self-esteem, demotivate, build fear, and lower productivity.

Regardless of these findings, Grobler et al. argue that “the existence of a good performance review system can be of great value to the organisation, the department and the individual” (2002:260). It should be taken into account that Spangenberg's work was published in 1994 and almost two decades later no visible withdrawal from PAs has been noticed. Universities still prescribe textbooks advocating the benefits of PAs, scholars are still researching and publishing articles on PAs in South African businesses, and popular business websites offer guidelines which encourage and promote the correct implementation and practice of PAs. Judging by the scarcity of recent literature available within the local context, it is clear that insufficient research has been done and that PAs should not be discarded without further investigation.

An example of a more recent scholarly contribution is that by Zewotir (2012), who contends that PAs are critically important for guaranteeing organisational success as their main purpose is to increase employee efficiency and to assist in management transparency. He elaborates this point by stating that PAs result in a better understanding among employees and supervisors, and that employees develop a greater sense of ownership of their duties, resulting in improved performance. He warns that neglecting PAs could lead to a decrease in company morale which would in turn be to the company's overall detriment (2012:44). His work on PAs in the South African workplace focuses on the subjective effect that a rater's evaluation will have on an employee. He raises the point that a supervisor's first impression of an employee may taint the level of objectivity practised in measuring an employee's work performance; therefore the ideal would be to minimise the effect of the first impression on PAs. He claims that this subjectivity has been noticed in the behaviour of all raters and is referred to as "the rater's effect". The majority of research in the field of PAs typically reports on the variance between raters' evaluations and employees' actual performance (2012:44). He suggests a linear mixed model for rating employee performance to address issues such as subjectivity and bias. This model allows for a certain amount of variability with regards to the weight that the rater's evaluation carries in the outcome of the overall employee assessment (2012:52). Zewotir thus acknowledges that the PAs currently in use are not flawless, but proposes that there are ways to bridge the issues companies are currently experiencing with their PA systems.

To my knowledge, no studies exist that investigate PAs from a linguistic or discourse perspective; however, a small number of studies from outside of South Africa do provide some information regarding the linguistic construction of PAs. The scarcity of these studies is surprising as discourse is the main tool through which PAs are performed.

### **3.3.5 A linguistic interest in PA**

Literature regarding PAs, meetings, interviews and general workplace behaviour is commonly found in the business management domain. Only recently has the workplace become a field of interest for linguists (see, for example, Billbow, 1997; Koester, 2002; Vasquez, 2004; Schnurr, Marra and Holmes, 2007; Vine, 2009; Holmes and Riddidford, n.d.) and discourse analysts (Asmuß, 2008). (See the discussion on OT in section 3.1 for an overview of linguistic workplace research.)

A linguistic approach is well suited to the study of PAs as they are typically rich in speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and politeness strategies with regards to performing face-threatening acts (FTAs) (Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987). Linguistic analysis can also shed light on how language is used to position the self as part of a group or a community (Wenger, 1998a, 1998b, 2000; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999), to sketch *figured worlds*<sup>14</sup>, to understand certain practices (Gee, 2010), and to highlight dominant discourses relevant to the practice of PAIs.

When investigating PAs from a linguistic point of view, Asmuß (2008) argues that it would be particularly beneficial to examine exactly how the PAI is constructed, e.g. exactly how critical feedback is given. She notes that the majority of research conducted on PA is concerned with what happens before and after the PAI, and that very little is known about what happens during the interview itself. Asmuß (2008:410) suggests that:

organisation emerges through communication ... This viewpoint is in line with one of the core assumptions of the method applied in this article, conversation analysis, namely, that participants in interaction recurrently negotiate about the context of the ongoing talk and thereby shape the organization itself...

She acknowledges that it would be presumptuous to declare the findings of a micro-analytical study generalisable, but that such studies are necessary to determine and reduce the impact of linguistic and culture-specific barriers to successful PAIs.

Asmuß (2008) explores how managers deal with negative assessment by analysing actual PAI transcripts through CA. She found that even though the institutional character of an organisation allows for negative assessments, this is still perceived as an action that is dis-preferred by managers and therefore socially problematic. Her research shows that the way in which the manager launches the negative assessment is directly linked to how the employee responds and participates in the PAI, i.e. employees align themselves to address the topic in the same fashion as the manager (2008:421). Another important finding is that even though managers are trained to let employees do most of the talking in PAIs (as mentioned above), it is indeed managers who talk most; therefore she argues that a closer investigation of the

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<sup>14</sup> "Figured worlds" can be defined as "a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (Holland in Gee 2010:170).

actual PAI is needed to evaluate existing guidelines on best practice and to consider how PAIs should be placed and performed within specific organisations (2008:411).

### **3.4 Summary**

This chapter described the postmodern approach to OT by exemplifying the importance of language and discourse within organisations. The benefits of discourse analytical approaches to organisational research were discussed, including the expanded scope of inquiry that was brought to the table. I drew attention to the possible stumbling blocks and the critiques associated with empirical research of organisational discourse. Thereafter, I discussed the concept of a CofP, before turning to PA. In the discussion of PAs, the particular focus was on the form and function of PAIs. I discussed some of the advantages and disadvantages of using PAIs as a tool for employee evaluation, and highlighted conflicting opinions of PAs within the South African context, pointing out the lack of research on PAs from a discourse perspective. Finally, linguists' interest in the workplace was explicated. It is to the methodology of this study that we turn in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology**

In this chapter a description of the methodological features of the present study will be presented. Details regarding the research design, data collection procedures and instruments, and data processing and analysis will be discussed. Also, a contextual description of the setting of the study, as well as a description of the participants will be provided, followed by an account of the researcher's role in the study. Finally, notes on the ethical considerations pertaining to the study will be discussed.

#### **4.1 Research design**

The present study adopts a qualitative approach which lies within the interpretivist paradigm. The selection of the specific research design was based on the nature of the research question stated in Chapter 1, namely: How do a selection of managers and employees (within three different companies in the Western Cape) experience and make sense of PAIs? The principal concern of the present study is to gain an in-depth understanding of meaning within a specific context. A qualitative research approach is particularly well-suited to the present study as it aims to “learn about how and why people behave, think, and make meaning as they do, rather than focusing on what people do or believe on a large scale” and “in addition to its critiquing function, qualitative research frequently falls within the context of discovery rather than verification” (Ambert, Adler, Adler and Detzner, 1995:880). New information may indicate new practices or behaviours including newly emerged forms of social organisation or structure, and finally, new ways of thinking or interpreting processes of socialisation and change (Ambert et al., 1995:880).

Specifically, a case study is done of three corporate workplaces in the Western Cape in order to provide in-depth descriptions of linguistic constructions used by different members within a business organisation as a CofP. Data were collected through individual interviews and focus groups.

## 4.2 Data collection

This section provides a brief overview of the setting of the research, with specific focus on the post-apartheid changing workforce of South Africa, and the social context of the Western Cape, including information on the language policy and demographic features of the province. Next, the participants are introduced, followed by an account of the data collection methods and instruments. Finally, a brief discussion of the analytical procedure of the research is presented.

### 4.2.1 Context: The South African workplace

After the demise of apartheid in 1994, the South African workplace has been undergoing an immense transformation. The process of transformation was accelerated via new laws administered by the democratically elected government. These laws promote affirmative action and Black Economic Empowerment to “bring in representative numbers of minority groups into a very powerful majority” (Grant, 2007:94). The new diverse workforce reflected the changing demographics of South Africa’s workers – more women, single parents, working couples, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities (Grobler, Wörnich, Carrell, Elbert and Hatfield, 2002).

Steyn (in Grant, 2007:93) defines workplace diversity as differences along various axes of, for example, race, gender, language, culture, ethnicity and disability. She emphasises that within the South African context race predominates what is understood by *diversity* due to the racially skewed legacy of apartheid. *Diversity management* became the new buzzword for the acceptance of cultural and ethnic differences among employees (Damane, 2001:34). However, Damane claims that in spite of these on-going attempts at workplace unification, diversity is still frequently met by negative attitudes as some individuals view the progression of post-apartheid transformation as a threat to their job security. Most companies and organisations have undergone drastic restructuring which called for necessary diversity communication and training in South African workplaces (Owomoyela, 1996). Diversity practices are often regarded as controversial or sensitive.

A decade after the first democratic elections and the commencement of workplace transformation, Van Wyk, Dahmer and Custy (2004) described South Africa as an “engine of growth”. In spite of the political and economic transformation since 1994 (and still being “a

work-in-progress”), the country ranked as one of the 10 leading emerging markets in the world (2004:259). The authors claim that in terms of infrastructure, legal system, human and natural resources, financial services and telecommunication, South Africa is regarded as a “sophisticated business environment”.

Almost 20 years later transformation is still an ongoing and challenging process. Not all perceptions of this complicated process are as favourable as the one offered above. Steyn (in Grant 2007:94) contends that:

the small White minority still acts as gatekeepers for the majority group who are in power politically but certainly not economically. The minority manages the flow into the organization and has also learnt to manage their ‘face presentation’. They won’t overtly oppose what is clearly just and right and democratic, but they use discourse that seems in favour of transformation and change, which really ensures that as little as possible changes.

This dissertation explores the perceptions of managers and employees of their specific workplaces, and will focus on how discourse is used to create certain images of the respective organisations. These findings will reveal something about how transformation is managed and perceived in the Western Cape. Although one cannot dispute the fact that language plays an integral role in terms of communicating and facilitating understanding and creating harmony in the workplace, I will argue that language is but one factor influencing how employees internalise their positions and make sense of organisational practices within the workplace. Other factors that play a part include how certain processes are accomplished, how workplace procedures are structured, the degree to which individuals are included in certain processes, and the level of employment.

As of late, researchers have become increasingly interested in incorporating various axes of difference within their studies of the South African workplace: Bowen and Cattell (2008) conducted a survey among quantity surveyors in South Africa to determine the relationship between job satisfaction, on the one hand, and workplace and demographic factors, on the other. The findings show that demographic factors such as gender and race play a significant role. Workplace characteristics, e.g. feelings of personal satisfaction, recognition, degree of supervision, participation in decision making, and social interaction at work, were also found

to be significantly coupled with job satisfaction. Some of the findings are particularly interesting with regards to the notion of a CofP and PAIs:

The findings indicate ... little recognition of achievements over and above normal responsibilities (61 per cent), opportunities to do challenging and creative work (57 per cent), opportunities to do varied and non-repetitive work (56 per cent), little feedback from superiors on performance (72 per cent), a low degree of supervision by superiors (82 per cent), feeling a member of a team and participating in decision making (77 per cent), and opportunities at work for social interaction and the development of close friendships (51 per cent). (Bowen and Cattell, 2008:264)

It is evident that transformation in the workplace is not an accomplished task, but can instead be described as a continuous process hindered by a lack of mutual understanding, cultural differences, intolerance, and the tension between resistance to change and the necessity to change.

#### **4.2.1.1 The linguistic setting of the research: Western Cape**

All three of the participating companies are situated in the Western Cape<sup>15</sup> province of South Africa. After the first democratic elections in 1994, English and Afrikaans were no longer the only two official languages of the country. Today, they share official national status with nine other African languages: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. These eleven languages reflect the country's ideals as formulated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996):

- establishing democracy,
- promoting equality and human rights,
- developing the people of the country,
- implementing affirmative action,
- administering the country effectively,
- developing national integration and promoting mutual tolerance and respect among the different cultural, linguistic, religious, racial and socio-political groups, and
- retaining the country's cultural diversity. (Webb, n.d.)

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<sup>15</sup> The Western Cape was specifically chosen as it provides a unique Afrikaans/English/isiXhosa dynamic. This province does not automatically assume English as a clear-cut Lingua Franca as is the case in Gauteng, for example.

All eleven languages may be used for official functions in the country, but of course it is impossible to implement all of them at once. Provincial governments are instructed to use at least two official languages for government business. The Western Cape Language Policy was passed by the Provincial Parliament in June 2004. The policy warrants that Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa will enjoy equal status and use within the province. I would like to highlight some of the policy's goals relevant to the present study:

- To ensure that the Western Cape is a caring home for all by promoting multilingualism.
- To give increasing effect to the equal constitutional status of the three official languages of the Western Cape.
- To empower and affirm speakers of previously marginalised languages.
- To eradicate the serious marginalisation of isiXhosa in the public service by resourcing and promoting the development and awareness of its official status.
- To foster respect and protect language rights, thereby avoiding the use of language for exploitation and domination based on gender, race, class, age, religion, culture or sexual orientation, or language that condones violence.
- To ensure social cohesion and improve relationships by promoting language diversity.
- Provincial and local governments shall encourage and advise private enterprises to develop and implement their own language policies in accordance with the framework of the Provincial Language Policy. (Western Cape Government website:

<http://www.westerncape.gov.za/eng/publications/policies/W/99328>)

The state is however often criticised for being too monolingual, i.e. relying mainly on the use of English. Deumert (2010) explores this issue in her article titled "*It would be nice if they could give us more language*" – *Serving South Africa's multilingual patient base*. Here she discusses the contradiction between post-apartheid patient empowerment policies and daily healthcare practice in the Western Cape.

... the Patients' Rights Charter (2002) and the National Health Act (2003) require providers to inform patients in a language they understand about their health status and treatment options. However, neither the Patients' Rights Charter nor the National Health Act specifies how this should be achieved ... (Deumert 2010:55)

The deplorable reality is that the majority of doctors and hospitals in the Western Cape are not equipped to treat isiXhosa-speaking patients, which results in unproductive doctor-patient

communication. This often leads to the incorrect treatment of patients which in turn has detrimental effects on their health. The major problem is that English is too often viewed as the country's lingua franca without taking into consideration the proficiency level of marginalised groups (Deumert 2010:54). Similarly, the culturally diverse companies involved in this study also refer to English as the official language of the company, even though not all employees are fluent in English or even able to communicate in English. However, it is important to note that even though English is supposedly seen as the official language of each of the participating companies, a great deal of internal communication takes place in Afrikaans. These internal "language policies" are shaped to accommodate the culturally diverse nature of the companies.

#### **4.2.1.2 Language policy in private organisations**

The issue of a "common language policy" in the workplace has not yet enjoyed much attention from researchers, especially within the South African workplace. The only information locally available on this issue is guidelines offered by national and provincial government, e.g. the Department of Arts and Culture's language policy framework which states that "Government will encourage, and where necessary support, private enterprises to develop and implement their own language policies in accordance with the national language policy framework." Steyn (in Grant, 2007:94) argues that this is not an easy task. She also draws attention to the fact that the use of English as international business language influences companies' language policies and in turn impedes transformation as no attempts are made to learn the languages of the majorities<sup>16</sup>. Likewise, it is argued in the Academy of Management Executive, that the country's eleven official languages, each with their own distinctive linguistic characteristics, prevent the use of a common language in the workplace which in turn prevents building a common understanding among employees (Dumane 2001:34).

The USA and several European countries are currently experiencing similar difficulties with establishing and implementing language policy rules within privately owned business organisations. This was made evident in an electronic newsletter written by Carlos M. Quiñones, from a law firm in the USA. The letter served as a warning that "common

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<sup>16</sup> In the interview with Terry Grant, Steyn refers to a "small White minority" and a Black majority "who are in power politically but not economically" (2007:94). Therefore the "languages of the majorities" refers to languages of the African language speakers.

language” or “English only” rules in the American workplace are considered to violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which is meant to protect employees against discrimination based on national origin. He lists a number of law suits against companies for enforcing this rule without being able to justify the business-necessity of the “English only” policy in certain situations with legitimate and well-founded reasons. He emphasises that such lawsuits have increased by 612% from 1996 to 2002. He argues that such policies severely impact minorities from diverse ethnic backgrounds and should rather not be implemented at all. Loos (2007) remarks that it is astonishing how little research has been done on language policy in linguistically diverse organisations up until now. He argues that private organisations have been greatly neglected in terms of investigating language choice; therefore research is needed to understand certain language policy mechanisms, i.e. to investigate which language is chosen by specific companies, by whom these choices were made and why, and whether/when speakers switch to other languages in certain situations. His argument is based on the questionable assumption that, as English is seen as a lingua franca throughout the world, companies with international connections (specifically in multilingual Europe) strive to adopt English as their contact language. He tests this hypothesis on a Dutch company that runs a holiday centre in Germany, and finds that English is not necessarily the contact language of choice in Europe. He argues that the focus should move from standard views of “globalization” and “world language”, to understanding the ways in which a specific environment is enacted. In conclusion, he poses that language choice can have a major impact on the success of organisations, and that language policy research is consequently imperative. Similarly, Heller (1995) suggests that language choice should be investigated as it is often the case that language is used by individuals to exercise symbolic domination, especially in institutions with ethnographically diverse staff.

The present study will also show that language choice and policy influence the degree of membership perceived by individuals within the workplace, which in turn contributes to a feeling of empowerment, or a lack thereof.

#### 4.2.1.3 Western Cape demographics

The following section will provide a brief demographic summary of the Western Cape with regards to cultural diversity and language. The reason for the inclusion of these figures is merely to outline the social context of the study – such racial classifications and distinctions are by no means the focus of the current study as it is not based on the theoretical framework of intercultural communication, but rather on discourses and membership within a CofP. The participants for this study were selected to represent a variety of L1s, and not ethnic groups. The figures below are supported by Census data from 2001<sup>17</sup>.

The census data show that 50.2% of people described themselves as “Coloured”, 30.1% as “Black”, 18.4% as “White”, and 1.3% as “Indian/ Asian”. Afrikaans has the highest number of home language speakers at 55.3%, and isiXhosa is the home language of 23.7% of the Western Cape’s population, while 19.3% of people are English speakers. The fourth most relevant language in the province is Sesotho at 0.7% of speakers. These percentages have not changed much since the 1996 census (Afrikaans has decreased with 4% and isiXhosa has increased with 4%). In light of these changes it can be expected that the 2011 census data will also reveal certain changes, but that these changes will not be substantial (given the lack of substantial changes from 1996 to 2001).

#### 4.2.2 Participating companies

A large number of business organisations were approached and invited to participate in the current study, but as PAIs are typically regarded as private and possibly sensitive in nature, only three companies responded positively to our request. The companies were selected on the following criteria:

- Companies must be situated in the Western Cape and must be relatively representative of the province’s demographic nature with regard to speakers of different L1s and different cultural backgrounds (see above).
- The companies must be large enough for internal hierarchies to exist.
- The companies must have a high regard for PAs and conduct PAIs at least on an annual basis.

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<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately the most recent census data (2011) have not been released yet.

- Various participants within each company must be selected from different workgroups, teams, salary brackets, and employment levels in order to get a feel of the company as a whole, and not just a specific department.

Companies A and B are both the headquarters of large retail companies with well over 300 stores each throughout South Africa. Company C is the head office of a leading national commercial healthcare consultancy. All three companies are situated in the Western Cape, have hierarchies in place, and have formal PA structures in place. Each company can be defined not only as a workplace, but also as a CofP<sup>18</sup> with smaller groupings within (Lave and Wenger, 1992).

The participating companies describe fairly comparable PA practices in terms of structuring and performing such appraisals. However, several differences were also reported. These differences in approach may be based on a number of factors, e.g. the size of the company, organisational hierarchy, the purpose and function of PAs, the goals of the organisation, “views on confidentiality of the appraisal material, and the degree of quantification and standardisation of reports” (Townley, 1997:267). In this regard, I use the term PA loosely (as I am in no position to enter into debates regarding technical issues, e.g. *performance management* versus *performance appraisal*), focusing more on the verbal construction of and participation in the interaction between a manager and an employee when discussing performance, than on the specific organisational structure of the performance discussion (be it in the framework of performance management or PA). As it was not possible to observe and record actual performance discussions, the focus of the study is on how participants make sense of these discussions, and how they talk about these discussions, irrespective of whether these discussions are part of PAs or PM.

A common PA feature of the participating companies is their dual- or multiple-rating system. A formal performance assessment interview is conducted on an annual basis at least. A standard document is issued which sets out the different categories for assessment, e.g. performance, achievements, behaviour, conduct, and competencies. It entails that employees

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 3 section 3.2 for a comprehensive discussion of the concept of a CofP and its relevance to the present study.

rate themselves, and they are then often also rated by their peers or teammates, and finally by their immediate supervisor. These ratings are then compared and discussed in these PAIs. Employees usually have a week or more to prepare for the formal periodic PAIs. Formal PAIs are used to acknowledge and praise an employee's achievements, to discuss areas of concern, to determine how to deal with difficulties the employee is experiencing, to set future goals, and to assess whether support such as training is necessary. Regular informal feedback discussions are also conducted when required. From my research it is also evident that within each company guiding principles do exist for PA, but are often regarded as non-binding by participants. The specific and comparable practices of PA within the three participating companies will be further investigated in Chapter 5.

To protect the identities of these companies, I have chosen to exclude any further distinguishing descriptions.

### **4.2.3 Participants**

Each company nominated<sup>19</sup> a number of participants in different departments, at different levels of employment, and from different cultural or social backgrounds. The only common factor among all of the participants in the study is that they are exposed to some version of their respective company's PA processes and structures. Thus they are all expected to participate in PA discussions (varying in level of formality) with either managers or employees (depending on their level of employment) more than once per year. Company A provided 19 participants (13 employees and 6 managers), Company B 6 participants (3 managers and 3 employees), and Company C 6 participants (2 managers and 4 employees). (The data presented in the table were collected by means of a language background questionnaire – see Appendix A.)

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<sup>19</sup> In most cases, the "nominations" were rather spontaneous – one HR manager informally invited employees passing by her office to participate in the study, whilst another gave me a diverse list of employee names and permission to approach any employees of my choice to participate. Only Company B took the liberty of setting up meetings with six employees prior to the interviews.

**Table 1: Information on participants**

<u>Number</u>	<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>L1</u>
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**Company A: Focus Group 1**

1	Kate	25	Female	Kitchen staff	isiXhosa
2	Jenny	42	Female	Kitchen staff	isiZulu
3	Amy	53	Female	Switchboard operator	English
4	Jane	39	Female	Cleaning staff	Afrikaans
5	Nina	35	Female	Kitchen staff	Afrikaans
6	Mary <sup>20</sup>	37	Female	HR	English
7	Bill	36	Male	Cleaning staff	isiXhosa

**Company A: Focus Group 2**

8	Carin	29	Female	Clerk	Xhosa
9	Ben	31	Male	Accounting	Zulu
10	Harry	34	Male	Helpdesk	English
11	Joe	25	Male	Imports	Afrikaans
12	Nora	34	Female	Admin officer	English
13	Alice	32	Female	HR	Afrikaans

**Company A: Managers**

14	Susan	44	Female	Top management	Afrikaans
15	David	49	Male	Middle/Lower management	Afrikaans
16	Izak	33	Male	Top management	Afrikaans
17	Luke	48	Male	Middle/Lower management	Afr/Eng (bilingual)
18	Daniel	32	Male	Top management	Afrikaans

<sup>20</sup> As this was the first focus group discussion held in the company, the company requested that Mary be present even though her level of employment is much higher than the other participants' positions within the company. Therefore it is possible that her presence influenced and shaped the discussion in certain ways. See section 4.2.5 for a detailed discussion on focus group data analysis.

19	Anele	46	Female	Top management	isiXhosa
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**Company B: Managers**

20	Liz	55	Female	Top management	English
21	Tom	48	Male	Top management	English
22	Herman	45	Male	Middle management	Afrikaans

**Company B: Employees**

23	Melissa	26	Female	Admin clerk	English
24	Felicity	26	Female	DC	Afrikaans
25	Peter	30	Male	Clerk	English

**Company C: Managers**

26	Elsabe	43	Female	Top management	Afrikaans
27	Nicola	35	Female	Middle management	English

**Company C: Employees**

28	Lisa	27	Female	Client services	Afrikaans
29	Marike	27	Female	Client services	Afrikaans
30	Wayne	23	Male	Consultant	English
31	Leon	22	Male	Consultant	Afrikaans

A total of 31 individuals participated in the study – 13 individuals participated in the two focus groups and 18 participants were interviewed individually. The interviews and focus groups with the participants were scheduled at a time that best suited them and were conducted either in each individual's office, or in a general meeting room (in the case of employees without their own private offices). The group of participants comprise of a range of L1s, cultures, economic backgrounds, power levels, educational backgrounds and social statuses. In terms of gender, there was a more or less even distribution in that 58% (n=18) of the participants were female and 42% (n=13) were male. However, the group is not

representative of the Western Cape population in terms of percentages of L1 speakers. Specifically, isiXhosa-speakers are underrepresented, comprising only 13% (n=4) of the participants in this study versus 24% of the Western Cape population, while English-speakers are slightly overrepresented, comprising 32% (n=10) of the participants versus 19% of the Western Cape population. Afrikaans-speakers make up 49% (n=15) of the participants, which comes quite close to the 55% of the Western Cape population that they make up. Only two isiZulu-speakers participated in the study, making up 7% of the participants. Since this is a qualitative study, what was most important was to have speakers from each of the three official languages of the Western Cape. Although it would have been ideal to have more isiXhosa-speaking participants (given the demographics of the Western Cape), this was something that was out of my control in that I only had access to the individuals who had been nominated by the companies.

#### **4.2.4 Data collection instruments**

The data for this dissertation were collected by conducting semi-structured individual interviews and two focus groups. (The interview schedules are included as Appendices C and D.) The first focus group consisted of seven participants, and the second of six participants, resulting in a total of 31 participants. Each company decided on the number of participants they were willing (and/or able) to nominate to participate in the research.

A role-play activity was also initially included in both the focus group and the semi-structured interview schedules. It was assumed that although role-play is, of course, less authentic than actual, “real life” PAs, companies would be more willing to allow their members to participate if they knew that the interviews would involve simulated PAs rather than recordings and observations of authentic PAs. Another assumption was that the role-play would still provide an indication of the linguistic strategies used in authentic PA. Unfortunately, one company responded negatively to the original role-play activity and therefore it had to be adapted on their request. It was explained that the company did not feel positively about troubling managers with role-playing as it would have been unsuitable, would make them feel uncomfortable, and would be seen as a waste of their time, and that it would have been more difficult to recruit managers to participate in the research if they knew that it included this activity. Thus, as a replacement activity instead of role-playing, a fictitious scenario was presented to each of the participants and they were asked how they would hypothetically respond in such a case. The participating lower level employees were

also asked to pretend that they were managers when responding to the given scenario – even though their positions in the company do not support the exercise, it is assumed that the way in which they respond when pretending to be managers, would reveal something about current practices within the company, as well as how they would personally and individually like these interviews to be handled. This activity provided some interesting data as it allowed participants to structure a hypothetical performance discussion in terms of organising information, selecting what they thought were critical points that needed to be discussed. In a sense the data from this activity shows how participants make sense of the process by indicating how they feel the discussion should be accomplished. In some instances employees strayed from the activity and compromised for their unwillingness to participate by reiterating the points that they thought were of importance, or by telling a PA story relevant to the scenario they were provided with. The data from these responses were all taken into account during the investigation of the dominant and competing discourses that emerged. Some significant stories of actual or hypothetical events that were presented during this activity were also deliberated through SSA as these tellings contain valuable information regarding individual identity and group identity construction.

Initially, all the managers were to be interviewed individually and the employees were to participate in focus groups. The reasons for the initial dissimilar handling of data collection are as follows: (i) It was assumed that it would have been more difficult to find a time in the managers' schedules during which they could all, simultaneously, attend a focus group. (ii) Considering their positions in the respective companies, it may also have seemed impolite (with regards to their personal inputs and opinions) to have managers participate in group discussions instead of an in-depth personal interview. (iii) Participating managers were also selected from different management bands, and therefore it was assumed that lower level managers / individuals new to management may not have been comfortable enough to challenge a top level manager on his/her opinions, especially in the presence of others.

Company A was the only company that was able to schedule focus groups among employees. One reason why focus groups were chosen is that this is more time efficient than conducting separate interviews. Unfortunately, conducting focus groups was not practical in all instances; therefore employees from Companies B and C were also interviewed individually, using the same semi-structured interview schedule as was used in the focus groups. Other

important advantages of focus groups are discussed below in section 4.2.5, clearly illustrating why this data collection method is very well suited to the present study.

#### **4.2.5 Focus groups**

Focus group discussion was specifically chosen as data collection method as it is an inclusive technique which allows for data elicitation and collection through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher (Morgan, 1996). Focus groups can be seen as a “playground” for socially constructed discourse and are ideally suited to this study as the focus is primarily on situational communication within a CofP. It allows the researcher to investigate the notion of PAIs (including how employees make sense of such meetings, how they experience them, and how they are constructed within a company) without actually having to be present in such a private meeting. Morgan (1996) argues that focus groups enable us to obtain data that are not available in individual interviews or participant observation. Interaction takes place not just between the researcher and the participants, but also includes a great deal of interaction among the participants which provides evidence regarding agreement or differences of opinions. It also sets the scene for participants to share small stories / narratives (Barkhuizen, 2008) in support of their insights. Group interaction typically emphasises participants’ experiences and opinions (Morgan, 1996; Morgan and Krueger, 1993; Morgan and Spanish, 1984). Another great advantage of focus groups is that a large amount of data on a specific topic can be obtained in a limited period of time. It has been found by Fern (1982) that for example, two eight-person interviews could provide more information than 10 individual interviews. As with practically all other data collection methods, a wealth of critique has been launched against the use of focus groups (e.g. that they are difficult to transcribe and that certain individuals may dominate the discussion, or that participants may say what they feel the moderator wants them to say), but considering the advantages discussed above, it is the data collection method most suited for the present study as it complements the nature of the research. The questions used to guide the focus group discussions were similar to the questions in the semi-structured interview schedules and focused on procedures and feelings pertaining to PAIs (see Appendix C).

#### **4.2.6 Semi-structured interviews**

Longhurst (2009) characterises semi-structured interviews as verbal interchanges aimed at eliciting information and often taking on a conversational nature as they are more flexible than structured interviews and allow participants to pursue issues that they feel are

significant. Semi-structured interviews are typically used to investigate complex behaviours, opinions and emotions and are therefore not concerned with verifying absolute truths. Common themes in research reliant on semi-structured interviews include “debates about meaning, identity, subjectivity, politics, knowledge, representation, and power...” (Longhurst, 2009). The main advantages of employing semi-structured interviews are that they allow for complicated questions, and that the response rate is higher than with written surveys (Seidman, 1998). Another interesting feature is that small stories (Bamberg, 2006; Barkhuizen, 2009; Deschambault, 2011) often present themselves in these interviews. These narrative accounts also present a route to gaining insight into how people understand and describe certain actions and feelings (Boyes, 2004). MacIntyre (1981:197) contends that “we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives we live out ... the form of narratives is appropriate for understanding the actions of others.”

The interview schedule contains questions focusing on the structure of PA meetings, feelings associated with these meetings, typical responses received during meetings, and factors contributing to successful and unsuccessful meetings (see Appendix B). The types of questions asked are therefore suited to address the research questions proposed in Chapter 1.

The interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and the recordings were transcribed by the interviewer (i.e. myself) and two assistants at the Department of General Linguistics, Stellenbosch University.

### **4.3 Role of researcher**

It is impossible to ignore the role of the researcher in qualitative interviews as the data is to some degree a result of the participant’s interaction with the interviewer (Seidman, 1998). As the interviewer, I was actively involved in the shaping of the discourse by guiding the interviews and focus group discussions to a certain extent in order to obtain specific data relevant to the research from the participants. Pavlenko (2007) explains that “in oral interviews, the degree of explicitness is co-constructed between the interviewer and the narrator, whereby some comments require further clarifications and others are accepted on the level of inferences. The co-constructed nature of the oral responses presents a challenge for analysis.” Just as participants attempt to achieve interactional goals (e.g. explaining,

describing, justifying a certain action or procedure), the interviewer also has a set of goals he/she is trying to achieve through the interaction (e.g. to elicit certain kinds of information). Lemke (in Tobin and Fraser, 1998) contends that when researching verbal data through DA, we are ultimately searching for linguistic and cultural meaning, and that what we are trying to analyse, is always highly context dependent and controlled by the researcher in terms of data selection, presentation and recontextualisation: “data is only analysable to the extent that we have made them a part of our meaning-world and therefore also data about us.” Therefore the researcher cannot be seen as an objective observer or an outsider to the discourse / text. In light of this awareness, great care was taken not to limit participants’ responses during the interviews and to allow participants to discuss matters they thought were more relevant than I could have anticipated when constructing the interview schedules.

I am in agreement with Söderberg (2006:404) that interviewing top-level managers has proven to be quite challenging as they possess substantially more social and economic power than researchers and some do not abstain from emphasising their power. As a developing researcher, I experienced certain encounters as slightly intimidating and found it difficult at times to take control of the interview in terms of probing for certain information, encouraging the participant to provide examples, and steering the conversation back when it was going too far off track.

For more information on the co-constructed nature of discourse, see Chapter 2. The challenges pertaining to the analysis of such co-constructed data are addressed in section 4.4.2 below.

#### **4.4 Analytical procedure**

This section will mainly focus on why DA was specifically chosen as analytical procedure, and certain relevant criticisms against DA will briefly be addressed (a more detailed account of the critiques of DA and organisational discourse analysis were provided in Chapter 3, section 3.1.6). An account will be given of how genre analysis was used to investigate the linguistic constructions of PAs within the workplace. Furthermore, this section will provide a description of how the large number of spontaneous and seemingly insignificant tellings included by participants were analysed predominantly for the function of investigating identity construction.

#### 4.4.1 Why DA?

DA is concerned with concepts such as the construction of social discourses (Gee, 2010) and text being a site of struggle (Fairclough, 1989; 2003); therefore it presented itself as the ideal analytical procedure for the present study. DA has become more important in the changing social and political environment in which we now live as “discourse ceases to be merely a function of work; it becomes work...” (Jaworski and Coupland in Davies, 2003). This method of analysis is also suited to this study as Cameron (2001) argues that researching talk is not an end in itself, but a means of studying other aspects of people’s lives; therefore the data are not merely seen as participants’ talk, but as discourse, which can in turn reveal certain insights about the world and the people in it.

#### 4.4.2 Criticisms against DA

As mentioned above, analysing oral responses is commonly regarded as quite challenging. Cameron poses that researchers often make the mistake of extracting small selections of text/talk (e.g. certain statements) and run the risk of composing a picture of juxtaposed responses which could easily reveal the insights of the researcher in terms of “how things seem to go together”, instead of presenting a more truthful account of the participant’s perceptions of the matter (2001:147). One loses sight of the interpersonal and environmental factors that stimulated the participant to respond in certain ways when the text is not viewed as a whole within a specific context. Therefore I have not electronically coded the data (as many researchers do) in order to retrieve and isolate different chunks of text from the context in which they were created. Instead, I focussed on each interview as a whole, viewing interesting utterances in relation to the rest of the “big picture”<sup>21</sup> whilst taking the interview setting and context into consideration.

Another characteristic of DA (specifically when used in the analysis of qualitative interview data) is that it is not typically seen as a method to investigate absolute truths, or to gain results which can necessarily be reproduced or tested. However, it does yield insights that other methods of analysis may not be able to, such as insights into the relationship between language and social order, individuals’ interaction with society (Jaworski and Coupland in Davies, 2003), personal opinions and beliefs of self-identification, and problems with self-

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<sup>21</sup> See section 4.4.3.2 for a discussion of the analysis of small stories in relation to the “big picture”, i.e. the rest of the data.

presentation (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). In the present study DA is employed to investigate the dominant discourses and feelings regarding PA as well as degree of membership to a CofP. To my knowledge, no other analytical method would allow for such specific insights.

An added critique levelled against DA regards objectivity – how do we know if the data are understood by researchers/analysts as the speaker/participant intended? (Cameron, 2001:136) Trappes-Lomax (in Davies 2003) explains that we make sense of utterances in light of various contextual factors and linguistic tools. Such approaches used to gain understanding include considering the cultures involved, the functions and structures of the language used, rules and principles underlying the utterances (pragmatics), as well as issues of power and politics. As researcher I am aware of the fact that I am also a member of a certain society, culture, and speech community, and that, therefore, my interpretations are grounded in specific communicative competencies, presuppositions and assumptions available to members of these cultural, contextual and social groups. Therefore one cannot realistically strive to achieve absolute objectivity in interpretative studies such as mine, but rather to analyse the data in an integruous manner. These interpretative tools are specifically of interest to interactional sociolinguists such as Schiffrin (1994) and Gumperz, (2001).

### **4.4.3 Tools of inquiry**

The data analysis will be discussed in two chapters. Chapter 5 investigates how PAIs are conducted within the three participating companies, and explores the dominant and competing discourses pertaining to performance discussions between supervisors/managers and employees. The main analytical tool to be used in Chapter 5 is *genre analysis* (see section 4.4.3.1); however, the analysis also benefits from *SSA* (see section 4.4.3.2). Chapter 6 serves to investigate how individuals construct themselves as members of a CofP and focuses on the process of identity construction within the workplace, consequently proving *SSA* to be invaluable as the predominant tool of inquiry.

#### **4.4.3.1 Genre analysis**

This dissertation argues that PAIs are a relatively conventionalised communicative professional genre, albeit constantly changing in response to the changing needs of users. Genre analysis is employed to investigate how PAIs are performed in terms of content, form and social practices within different business organisations (Bhatia, 1993). The analysis

reveals which aspects of PAIs can comparatively be considered generic across all three companies, also taking into account the characteristics of PAs set out in section 3.3.1. The analysis further explores the discourses emerging in the data revealing competing perceptions regarding which elements of PAIs are representative of standard practices, highlighting certain unique perceptions and uses of PAIs to companies, departments and individuals. DA will be employed to highlight the discursive struggles evident in the data pertaining to PAIs as professional genre.

#### **4.4.3.2 Using CofP and SSA in the investigation of identity**

##### ***CofP and identity construction***

The notion of CofP is of great importance for the analysis and the discussion of the data in this study; however it is not essential (although not necessarily inaccurate) to specifically label each participating company as a CofP. From the literature it is clear that researchers, as outsiders, have difficulty in determining the magnitude (with relation to size) of a specific CofP. The focus is not on the company as a whole, but rather on providing a qualitative analysis of the individuals interacting within the organisation – as core members, peripheral members, marginal members or outsiders in relation to each other, and as groups or communities within the workplace. It is impossible to know whether the individuals who were interviewed and who participated in the focus groups are all members of the same CofP within a company, although this is unlikely. But it is certain that every single participant does belong to one or more CofPs (be it the organisation as a whole, or a smaller group within the company), and in turn belongs to a constellation of practices. Similarly, it is reasonable to assume that each interviewee is also an outsider to other CofPs within the company – one cannot possibly belong to every single CofP within an organisation. A lower level employee, for example, would be an outsider to a CofP of managers. The analysis of the data will draw attention to how these individuals orient themselves as members of a CofP and towards other members and non-members. It will also address attitudes towards outsiders and peripheral members. Finally, a better understanding of how a CofP is constituted within each company may be gained by considering the degree to which different members engage in mutual participation to reach a common goal, which in this case is participating in a PA discussion.

## SSA

Due to the large number of small stories that emerged in the data, SSA became the main tool of inquiry into how participants construct themselves, others, and processes within the workplace. The theoretical framework for SSA was thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2. This section only provides a brief outline of the five-step model as proposed by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008:8).

The five-step process of analysis (across three positioning levels) is typically employed in order to explore what is revealed in the telling of a small story.

- i) Level 1 deals with how characters are positioned within the story in relation to each other and to time and space.
- ii) Level 2 looks at how the telling of the story is interactionally accomplished. This step involves conducting a line by line breakdown of the interaction focusing on e.g. how the story is introduced, and on turn taking.
- iii) The researcher takes the research setting into account as well as the presence and contributions of the moderator in terms of shaping the data.
- iv) Thereafter the interactional engagement between all the participants is analysed (e.g. in the case of a focus group interview).
- v) Finally, at Level 3, conclusions are drawn regarding how participants construct themselves and each other in relation to greater discourses (or the bigger story), and establishing how a sense of self / identity is constructed by the narrator(s).

During the analysis at Level 3, I will incorporate Barkhuizen's (2009) extended positioning theory, which advocates that the data in a small story should be connected to the data in the rest of the participant's interview, as well as to the entire body of data collected for the study. He argues that by doing this, much can be learned not only in terms of how the participant positions him-/herself within particular discourses, but also in terms of how the participant is (being) positioned by these greater discourses within the respective workplaces, in the greater setting of the Western Cape.

The small stories within the data support Bamberg's (2006) theory that identities are fluid and constantly under construction. Chapter 6 investigates how identities are continually constructed in order to be granted insider-status to certain CofPs. A detailed example of step-

by-step SSA (further developed into extended position analysis) will be supplied in section 6.1.2.

#### **4.5 Ethical considerations**

The relevant companies were approached for permission to collect data. After several meetings each company provided a signed letter granting their permission to continue with data collection within the relevant organisations. All participating individuals were briefed on the study and gave their informed consent, knowing that they could withdraw at any stage and that their anonymity was guaranteed. The researcher did not bribe or coerce anyone and the results are reported in such a way that it cannot be traced back to the participants, by making use of pseudonyms instead of their actual names. The Ethical Clearance Committee of Stellenbosch University's research department approved the research as they described the proposed study to be low risk and characterised the questions as non-threatening (see Appendix D).

#### **4.6 Summary**

This chapter presented a methodological overview of the present research. The setting of the Western Cape was described in terms of language policy and demographics. Transformations within the South African workplace were also taken into account. Criteria for company selection were presented, followed by a description of the participants. The research procedure was described in terms of research design, data collection, and analytical procedures which included a brief discussion of DA in general, genre analysis as set out by Bhatia (1993), and Bamberg and Georgakapoulou's (2008) five-step method of SSA. Reasons were provided for certain decisions which shaped the research (e.g. the use of focus groups, semi-structured interviews and DA). The role and the influence of the interviewer in the research were also acknowledged. The following two chapters will demonstrate the application of these analytical tools and concepts to the data collected in this study.

## Chapter 5

### Investigating the Discursive Struggle in Performance Assessment as Genre

In this chapter I attempt to address research questions 1 and 2, by discussing how PAs (and, in particular, PAIs) are generally constructed as a professional genre within three different organisations in the Western Cape, and simultaneously identifying and analysing the dominant and competing discourses used to construct PAs as a genre within each participating company. Following Bhatia's (1996) recommendation for investigating how genres are constructed, this chapter will look at how participants construct the *form and content* of PAs as a genre, the specific *function* of PAIs within each company, as well as the *social practices* associated with the PA genre. The analysis will reveal discursive struggles and generic versatility among and within companies with regards to what constitutes the genre of PA.

The quote below will serve as departure point for the analysis and discussion of the data. The relevance of this specific quote will be explained as the chapter progresses.

Following Swales, Bhatia (1993:13-14) defines genre as:

... a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs. Most often it is highly structured and conventionalized with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form and functional value. These constraints, however, are often exploited by the expert members of a discourse community to achieve private intentions within the framework of socially recognized purpose(s).

#### 5.1 Form and content of PAs

This section will investigate how PAs are constructed as a genre through the discourse of individuals within each company. I shall specifically set out to determine which dominant aspects (specifically pertaining to content, form and function) of PAs lead us to conclude that they are indeed recognisable as a structured and conventionalised communicative event. I shall also illustrate that less conventionalised structures co-exist within this genre, thus further strengthening my argument that PAs are a site of struggle.

Upon first meeting with Company A and Company B's HR managers, they each communicated that they were not entirely satisfied with their (current/former) PA programmes and were consequently in the process of changing these programmes. This does not come as a surprise as Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995:6) point out that genres are constantly changing based on the needs of the users. In light of this information, it is fair to assume that as PA programmes are changed or adapted within a company, the actual performance discussions or PAIs are also influenced by this transformation. Both companies gave their consent to participate in the study on the premise that it is a linguistic study, and not a business management study, and therefore their actual PA programmes would not be scrutinised in detail, but rather the focus will be on the linguistic construction of PAIs as a genre.

As there is a consensus among practically all the participants that ad hoc performance discussions (do and should) occur all the time as needed (based on the premise that performance management is a continuous process), it became clear that discussing an employee's performance is not restricted only to the official scheduled meeting(s). My interview schedule therefore included questions to elicit information not only about official PAIs, but about all performance discussions (formal and informal) which form part of a company's PA programme.

When asked which factors could possibly influence the success of a performance discussion, an overwhelming majority of the participants listed aspects pertaining to the manager; therefore a dominant discourse emerges that the success of a PAI depends on the manager. The managerial duties listed by participants included: being prepared, being present in the meeting, listening to the employee, being open-minded, not being disrespectful to the employee, ensuring that all the agenda points get discussed, knowing the individual/how to approach each individual, being able to read the situation, and having concrete evidence at hand (e.g. facts, figures and statistics pertaining to performance). The examples in (1) below illustrate managers' conviction that the success of a PAI lies in their hands:

(1)

**Tom:** I think preparation from my side and the fact that the employee on the other side has the chance to look at the questionnaire also so I do my homework properly so that when they come they know what I'm talking about.

**Herman:** I think it is the environment, firstly, and the way you approach it ...

**Niel:** I would say preparation ... ah, good listening skills, and being present in the meeting ... (XXX) ... being in control of yourself.

**Susan:** I would always make sure that I prepare [in] my head, what are the things that I must make sure I say, and what are the things that I must-must-must make sure that I don't say. For the indiv- so that's why each individual will be def-different, some you can say straightaway, you can just say it as it is, and with others you sort of must soften the blow. (XXX) .... It is, um ... if it's non-threatening ... if it is honest ... um, if it is understanding the other individual ... if you know, if I understand – not just the circumstances what we are discussing, but also the individual personality kind ...

As can be seen in example (2) below, data from the employee interview transcripts also support the argument that managers are responsible for the success of a PA discussion:

(2)

**Marike:** it also depends on the type of boss that you have- obviously ... someone that's .... very aggressive ... is going to ... they ... they gonna bombard you with negative feedback and negativity, whereas you've got a boss that's ... social, ... they interact with you, they ... know you on a different level ... they know how to approach you. And that ... in fact leads to you being more comfortable ...

Consequently, the bulk of the information to be discussed in this section (5.1) is provided by the managers, as it is predominantly assumed to be “standard practice” for the managers to ensure that a PAI is constructed correctly in terms of form and content in order to achieve the desired outcomes. The participating employees mainly contributed to the discussion regarding the perceived functions of PAIs (see section 5.2).

This section focuses on how the managers in the three participating companies discuss the general PA process. This is important as it situates the actual PAIs in the larger practice of PA (see section 5.3 on PAs as social practice). None of the participating companies offers a completely uniform account of how PAs are accomplished. Five of the six managers from Company A relay a relatively standard procedure, with only the sixth manager indicating that he follows his own format. Three managers explicitly say that they have a set procedure in the company that they follow:

(3)

**David:** What we have is set (unclear) ...

**Anele:** Okay, we have a program – that’s what our company want ...

**Izak:** Uh, in (XXX) we have a set type of procedure ...

Two managers describe a customary procedure by emphasising the regularity and familiarity of specific meetings or discussions which can be characterised by specific elements:

(4)

**Susan:** ... there’s monthly-monthly sessions, and then one-on-one, we call it one-on-one discussions. ... balance positive and negative (as Anele said) – very factual

**Daniel:** Well, normally we go through what the key performances are....

The sixth manager who states that he uses his own way of conducting a PAI articulates this in the following way:

(5)

**Luke:** I would call them in. What I do is I’ve got a quarterly interview with each of them. I rate them on reports that I get back ...

... this is just something I brought with me – it’s not in the company policy ...

In Company A all the managers also emphasise that PAs involve a so-called “both-rating” system. This entails that the managers rate the employees and the employees rate themselves, and this rating is discussed in a one-on-one scheduled meeting. All three participating

managers from Company B also emphasise this part of the process. One major difference, however, is that even though some of the participating managers from Company B allude to a set company procedure, they all describe using an altered procedure to perform PAs with their subordinates, clearly indicating that PAs differ substantially from one department to another. These departmental distinctions are evident in the examples provided in the discussion of Company B's PA structure:

(6)

**Liz:** Okay, with um the team that reports to me - they' not on the (Company B)'s performance appraisal system ... so we ... or we ... in conjunction with HR, we drew up um ... a performance appraisal document. It ... it simply follows the the system that (Company B) uses, it/it's all paper-based.

**Tom:** Ja, with my own employees, firstly we set a date, um, basically I set a list of questionnaires /uh, sorry, a list of questions...

**Herman:** Normally - I had once/every morning had a meeting, of the previous day's performance. It's a set time that we normally agree with. Book it on a calendar and come to my office, (unclear) all the reports. And normally to introduce/greet them in the morning, and they need to tell me what happened yesterday and from there on we're gonna sit and see how can we deal with th' thing.

The two participating managers from Company C offer very distinct descriptions of how they conduct PAIs: Elsabe offers a discourse of PAs as impersonal and mathematical, explaining the documents they use, scales in rating, facts and figures, spread sheets, averages, numbers, and calculations. She gives a detailed account of using the both-rating system where the employees as well as the managers both rate employee performance, and the ratings then get compared and discussed in a scheduled meeting. Elsabe, the employee, and the employee's team leader are present in the meeting<sup>22</sup>. The main purpose of their PAIs is reward orientated as the PAI plays a role in determining the employee's bonus at the end of the year:

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<sup>22</sup> Coincidentally, Company C is the only company which states having three people present during the PAI, instead of only the manager and the employee, as is the case in Companies A and B.

(7)

**Elsabe:** So we've got a document, it say the contracted performance areas ... this adds up to 100% ...

In contrast, Nicola (one of the team leaders present in the meetings between Elsabe and her subordinates), offers a discourse of PAIs as informal discussions, devoid of detail, informally referring to the PAI as a "chat regarding their performance". Her interview transcript shows that the researcher had to ask very specific questions to confirm that she considered the process to be the same as described by Elsabe. The contrasting descriptions offered by Elsabe and Nicola are particularly interesting given that Elsabe is always present in the formal PAIs between Nicola and her subordinates.

(8)

**Nicola:** I ... chat with them regarding their performance ... and then I also put it on email in writing to them ... so that there's a paper trail.

**T:** Is there like a formal meeting that you schedule in advance ... ?

**Nicola:** Yes...yes...

**T:** And do you do like performance assessments where they rate themselves?

**Nicola:** Yes ... yes we do ... every 3 months ... ah (gives me a copy). They rate themselves and thereafter I go through it with them myself and Elsabe, my boss – we go through it with them and we rate them.

The vagueness and length of Nicola's answer could possibly be due to the fact that she is new to management (she has only been the team leader for less than a year), lacks management training, and is not as involved with calculating the numbers as Elsabe is. The successful outcome of PAs is generally seen as Elsabe's responsibility in this company as she is the operations manager and therefore her answers are more business driven. Throughout the rest of Nicola's answer she reveals that she takes a more personal, social approach to workplace discussions, as opposed to Elsabe's mechanical methods. Although there seem to be some similarities between the companies (such as the both-rating system), there also seem to be differences not only across companies but also within companies; in fact, in some cases (such as that involving Elsabe and Nicola) different accounts are even given for one and the same meeting. In sections 5.1.1 to 5.1.3 below, the three companies' descriptions of the form and

content of their PA(I)s are analysed in more detail, before turning to the perceived functions of these PA(I)s in section 5.2.

### 5.1.1 Company A

The interview schedule was structured in such a way to discuss with the participants: (i) how a PAI is typically organised; (ii) the language(s) the meeting is conducted in; and (iii) the actors who are present in certain meetings. When asked how they would go about conducting and structuring a PAI, the common response from the six managers from Company A was that it depends on a list of factors, e.g. the individual/personality of the employee, how long the employee has been in the current position, the particular manager's style, and the severity of the situation. This is particularly interesting as earlier the PA process was discussed as having a "set procedure", while here the heterogeneity of PAIs is emphasised. Anele takes the time to explain exactly which factors (should) determine how PAIs are structured and to justify why no exact PAI template can exist:

(9)

**Anele:** in life...we can't really stick to formulas. Things are so different. And people ... depends where they are in/in their private lives, the way they are emotionally ... how they're brought up – there's so much that counts to play. And if we were to say: this is the way to do something, then we will miss others. So, you have people maybe, who are ... willing to work, who are willing/who want to go the extra mile, but there is something that we see as a weakness, because it doesn't suit us – maybe as an individual, maybe as a way the team is built up. So now in ... what you've sketched- that scenario, for me ... if I were to handle that, I would just have to quickly check: who in my team am I dealing with? Is this person male or female? Because I see there's different approaches just based on gender. And then, I will have to also / to look at/in terms of race –where/where do they come from? Eh, in terms of language ... that also plays a role. And then the interference: what I am not happy with – Is it because / because it affects me as a manager and individual – I hate that style, or it/it interferes with/with the work. Does it contribute to delay of/of delivery? Is it ... constance? Is it creating a pattern? Or is it a once off? So ... a simple answer would be: you need to deal with it, you need to call that person ... *aside*. You need to address it and tell them ... what, eh, um ... is not going on well. And maybe, in some instances, that's not the best approach to resolve the problem ... maybe delay it for the time being. Maybe in some instances I may have to see: this is the kind of person they are. So I now need to pull them in/in terms of ... putting responsibility back into their hands ... (XXX) ... I want to deal with the individual, as an individual.

It is clear that Anele emphasises the heterogeneity of PAIs and the individual factors that influence the structure of a PA scheduled meeting. Quite a few managers (from all companies) mention that the success of a meeting partially depends on being present in a meeting, knowing the individual, and knowing how to react at that moment. This notion is supported by several employees stating that they do not find PAIs particularly daunting because they know their managers, their managers know them, and they have good relationship. This indicates that they are not particularly unhappy with the way their managers conduct PAIs and that the managers apparently know how to go about making an employee feel comfortable during a PAI. A small number of employees, however, mentioned that they do have some (minor) issues with the ways in which their managers go about conducting PAIs – see (10) and (11) below.

(10)

**Bill:** Like a...um...when he's gonna tell you something, he can't just come sit: This is what you've done ... relax, say something, or he's not going to tell me ... (unclear)

(11)

**Ben:** ... sometimes you get, you know, probably a ... a/a/a/a bad reaction from/from/from a leader. And, uh ... from my personal experience ... (mumble) ... you should sh/he/ or she would never come and say: good morning. She would just come in, get the matter ... you know ... the first reaction, I would say: Good morning. Just make it ... make the personal ... no, you need to first greet, before you can ... appro/so you do ... have that.

Excerpts (10) and (11), from Focus Groups 1 and 2 (henceforth “FG1” and “FG2”), respectively, clearly illustrate that not all employees have a personal relationship with their managers that enables the manager to know how to approach the employee. It is quite possible that this kind of relationship is not a priority for all managers, and that in spite of the “open communication” in this company, some employees are still enduring troublesome approaches and do not feel comfortable taking up these issues with their supervisors. Once again we find a contradiction of earlier discourses about how easy and comfortable PAIs are. What is clearly emerging is a multi-voicedness when the form and content of PAIs (and the general PA process) are discussed. Multi-voicedness is defined by Bakthin (1981) as a

number of voices (world-views) apparent in particular discourses or represented in texts (see section 2.5.3). The interaction of voices is responsible for the dialogic quality of a text.

This multi-voicedness is not only evident in the discourse of the employees but also in the discourses of the managers. When presented with the role-play, a competing discourse comes to light as more than half of the participating managers claim to resort to a personal type of template in terms of organising the agenda points for the meeting, indicating how they would typically deal with the situation in real life:

(12)

**David:** (XXX) ... That's how our conversation starts. After that we discuss ... why ... there's improvement or why he's good in one area, and not so good in another area, what ... where as a team we can get him up to standard on an area that he's not good in ...

The excerpt above was taken from David's interview after he described the company's typical discussion of ratings. When asked how he would typically deal with giving negative feedback, he states that "what we do" is start with the ratings, then point out the areas where the individual was rated lower, enquire as to what the problem is, and attempt to find a solution. When asked how he would typically deal with positive feedback, he states that "we go through that same ... exact same process". From the use of the collective pronoun "we" he reveals that this is the way he believes all managers within the company structure PAIs, or that he believes that he is doing it "the company way".

Likewise, Luke also reveals that he does not tailor the PAI structure to a particular employee or situation. He consistently refers to his team as "them", unlike David who when discussing PAIs refers to the "person" or the "employee". Even though Luke acknowledges cultural and linguistic diversity within his group, he never mentions that he would cater his PAIs to a specific person. Throughout his interview he repeatedly gives an account of what he would typically do, each time confirming that he has one particular way which he applies to all his team members:

(13)

**Luke:** this is what you did good. Now this is the problem area. How can we make that, as good as that

And when presented with the role-play, his response echoes the earlier descriptions of his method:

(14)

**Luke:** ... Obviously ... I would address him on his on his good things first, and then I'm gonna tell him about the deadlines. I will sort that out. At the end of the day we're still running a company that needs to make money - for us to have a job, and if we don't do that ... if I don't do my bit, the one above me won't be able to do their bit, and in the end we're gonna sit without a job. I'll approach it ... uhm ... tell him the pro's and the cons ... of him doing this, and doing that. But I will first make sure he understands that his uh ... communication skills are good, and then I will bring up the negative things, he needs to understand what negative effect he also has on the team, but not ... somebody else must do double now to help him.

**T:** And how will you end that discussion?

**Luke:** I will ask him: what are you gonna do about it ... uh ... correcting this. How are we gonna go about it? In a month's time, let's review this and see from there ...

Luke's response (in concurrence with many of the other managers' responses) reveals specific ways of textual/discoursal organisation, e.g. starting with the positive feedback, then addressing areas for improvement, and concluding the discussion with a strategy for improvement or goal-setting. Bhatia (1996) refers to this kind of textual organisation as "structural moves". Swales (1981, in Bhatia 1996:30-33) showed how texts belonging to the same genre displayed significant similarities in terms of organisation, and subsequently (Swales 1990) posed that the communicative purposes of a genre are realised in a variety of layers of texts, specifically "moves" and "steps", which function as dominant units of analysis. Bhatia (1993:32) further developed the notion of structural moves<sup>23</sup> and noted that

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<sup>23</sup> Bhatia's (1993) analysis of English sales letters shows that structural moves are employed to achieve certain communicative purposes, for example, to attract the readers' attention, to introduce an offer, to give positive appraisals of the product, and to encourage the reader to purchase the product. Structural moves used to communicate the functions are, for example, attention grabbing headlines, stressing selected informative phrases (e.g. "one night only"), and the inclusion of postscripts (a note appended to a completed letter, e.g. "P.S. Don't forget that we'd love to send you a free gift").

the nature of such structural moves is determined by the purpose of the specific genre, as well as the social and cultural context in which the communicative purpose is embedded<sup>24</sup>.

In Company A we thus find contradicting descriptions of PAIs: some acknowledgements that PAIs should be tailored to individuals' needs but also clear indications of managers reverting to a conventionalised template for performing PAIs, possibly depending on each manager's unique managerial style. (Managers thus seem to rarely adapt their behavioural styles according to an employee's individual needs, contrary to what is argued in section 3.3.3.) Thus, we find a tension between claiming to acknowledge the heterogeneity required for the process and falling back on the same way of conducting PAIs, regardless of individuals' needs. Bakhtin (1986) refers to this phenomenon as *heteroglossia*, i.e. the tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces. *Heteroglossia* literally means "different-speech-ness" and refers to the conflict between official and unofficial discourses within the same language; however, the concept of heteroglossia is also applicable at a micro-linguistic level as every utterance contains traces of other utterances, and discursive sites reveal conflicting voices<sup>25</sup>. In terms of content the aspect of PAIs that the participating managers from Company A unanimously agreed upon was that PAIs are first and foremost a platform for discussing *ratings* (as discussed earlier under general PA practices – see section 3.3.3). I have specifically chosen Izak's description of PAIs being a ratings discussion as it is the most detailed and representative of all the tellings.

(15)

**Izak:** Uh, in (XXX) we have a set type of procedure where we have a document that gets send out to uh ... each individual, from there they need to o ... obviously rate themselves, and send it out to their colleagues, and ... team members, and ... from there I will also do my assessment, then we will have the one on one discussion, and, uhm, go through the list of competencies and performance areas, and discuss, as to why they think they're on the rate that they subsequently rated themselves on. I would look at my rate, see if it's more or less the same, and obviously, uh ... colleague or team members rate as well, and then we will have a discussion, and uh, basically just motivate ... that ... for the person to understand as to why there's possibly a

<sup>24</sup> Zhu (2000:477), for example, found that in Chinese sales letters, greetings often function as structural moves in order to establish a relationship with the reader (e.g. "How are you?").

<sup>25</sup> Heteroglossia should not be confused with *multi-voicedness* as the latter refers to the equal representation of multiple voices within discourse, and is not characteristic of conflict and tension (Bakhtin 1994:248-249).

difference between the ratings. If there's no difference, then, obviously, I would also ask that person to motivate as to why that person rated herself ... (mumble) It happens ... informally ... it happens like monthly, but formally it would be so ... every 5 months ... They have so ... say a month to a month and a half, 'cause obviously they need to send that questionnaire out to ... to ... uhm ... colleagues and other team members.

In addition to discussing ratings, the most dominant features or move-structures of Company A's PAIs (mentioned by all participating managers) include: giving positive feedback; giving negative feedback by way of addressing problem areas; enquiring as to why certain problems exist and what can be done to address the relevant issues; offering guidance and assistance to the employee; discussing the employee's impact on the company/team/department; using the PAI to gather information from the employee, to ask the employee for feedback; giving the employee an opportunity to address any issues on their agendas; and discussing the employee's need or desire for further training. From the sixth manager (Luke) it becomes clear that this set procedure described by the first five managers only applies to certain employees and departments within the company, and that he does not follow this procedure with his team, the service assistants (the lower level employees who do not have desk jobs). These employees are not given the opportunity to participate in PAIs in the same way as the teams who are included in the set PA procedure, the most obvious distinction being that they do not rate themselves, but only receive one rating from their leader:

(16)

**Luke:** In English. It's a one on one. I would call them in. What I do is I've got a quarterly interview with each one of them. I rate them on reports that I get back ... from other members ... working relationships ... with the with the people that we work with, then I will discuss it with them on a basis of 5/out of 5. I would say 3's average, obviously 4, much better, and then I will try to make ... if there's a problem- how do we reach a compromise ... from both sides.

**T:** So that happens four times year?

**Luke:** Four times a year, yes.

**T:** So do they rate themselves and you rate them?

**Luke:** Yes.

**T:** And how long do they have to prepare?

**Luke:** (shakes head) No. I ... I don't give them ... Normally I'll just rate them and I'll go it through. I will normally bring out their good points first, uh, this is just something I brought with me – it's not in the company policy. It's what I brought with me from the (military).

Because at the end, once a year, we must do uh a assessment for each one of us, so if I have four discussions with them, it makes my life easier, (mumbles) I can just grab that together and put it on one ... sheet of paper. So ... I will highlight their uhm, wrongdoings, so-called wrongdoings, or uhm, problem areas, but I will also highlight the the the good areas, because then I compare: what do we do.

Even though Luke constructs his telling of his own unique PAI procedure, it does compare to the other manager's descriptions in a number of ways, e.g. his procedure also includes discussing employees' ratings (despite the one-sidedness of these ratings), and he also makes use of the PAI to acknowledge good performance, to give negative feedback, and to focus on a way forward. Therefore, he not only addresses more or less the same content as the other managers do, but also uses the same structural moves (Bhatia, 1996). From Luke's telling one can conclude that these quarterly PAIs with the lower level employees are not compulsory and that Luke is not asked to report back on these quarterly discussions; he is only expected to perform an annual assessment according to the company policy. Therefore he may not be aware that the structure and the contents of his PAIs are relatively similar to the other managers' PAIs as it is not expected of him to perform PAIs more frequently. Based on the interviews with the six managers, we are led to believe that more regular PAIs are only expected of employees and managers at a higher level, which consequently means that employee participation in these circumstances is also only required at higher levels; therefore participation is not equally expected and prioritised throughout the entire company.

The lower level employees participating in FG1 contributed very little with regards to what they perceived the standard contents of a PAI to be. Mary is the only participant who mentions that she has a monthly one-on-one meeting with her supervisor, which, taking into consideration the seniority of her position, supports my claim that higher level employees are given the opportunity to participate in PAIs on a more regular basis. It is therefore understandable that Mary came across as much more knowledgeable about the content, form and function of PAIs in general. FG2's discussion also did not focus much on the content of PAIs other than the fact that PAIs are associated with discussing negative and positive feedback in a non-threatening way, enforcing the idea that PAIs definitely do involve free and open communication from both participants. The participants of FG2 also confirmed that the regularity of one-on-one performance discussions varied across departments as they

reported (in concurrence with the managers) to participate in either monthly or quarterly PAIs, as well as a more official so-called “360”<sup>26</sup> (annual) performance meeting.

### 5.1.2 Company B

In Company B Liz mentions that her team is “not on the company appraisal system” and that an appraisal document was specifically designed for her team in conjunction with HR, based on the same principles as in the rest of the company. She is also currently training three of the supervisors reporting to her to conduct PAs within their own teams. She adds that before she joined the company, her subordinates had not participated in PAs for over five years. She compares the system she employs with her subordinates to the system her manager employs with her (i.e. for her own performance evaluation):

(17)

**Liz:** And the other thing, just to give you some understanding - I have three supervisors ... and what I've been doing as well is coaching them to do their subordinates. So the level one people -they will do their performance appraisals first, so I give them their goalposts and say “right that's when you're gonna have your performance appraisals” and they know then that they must have completed their lower subordinates before they come ... to um their performance appraisal with me. And what we do is we first discuss their/their subordinates, so their reportees, and how it went with theirs, how comfortable they were, what was the result and things and we discuss the ratings they come up with and if I don't agree with some the ratings they've had ... then we will discuss why I don't agree with their ratings and ... we will come to an agreement which they then will pass back down again. So it becomes a bit of ... it's a coaching and a learning experience for everybody 'cause ...the very low/ the low subordinates – say the level one's just for make it easier. They, um, also hadn't had performance appraisals; my team also hadn't had performance appraisals for I don't think I dunno five or ten years but when I came here. So it's been a whole learning curve for them. But ours are all verbal and on pieces of paper unfortunately.

**T:** Why unfortunately?

**Liz:** Well the one on the system that I do with my boss is really nice.

**T:** And how does that work?

**Liz:** You get logged in and you sit at some stage and you land up with all your key performance areas and your KPI's and all of that. So I don't know I think I've got ten or fifteen

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<sup>26</sup> “360” is the term that is used for the official annual one-on-one performance meeting between an employee and a manager in Company A.

areas that I get monitored on - The accuracy of the payments, how many ... (unclear) we don't pay. You know all the variety of the items that we've got. It's all on the computer and then when it's coming up for my appraisal I go into the system and I log in and then I rate myself and my boss goes and does the same. And when the two of us come together we can log in simultaneously and it picks up both of them and it says "reconciliations are up to date" and I might have said that I'm a three and he thinks from the information that he got from finance that I'm a five and it'll come up saying that he said I was a five and I'm a three and we agree to disagree and then we can log it.

As with Company A, Liz's description of the two PA systems confirms that not all employees are exposed to the same PA procedure. For many years the lower level employees in her team were overlooked by the company's PA system, and thus not given the opportunity to discuss their performance in the same manner as employees at a higher level. They were also not given the same opportunity to enhance employee-supervisor communication, to form a relationship with their supervisors based on regular one-on-one discussions, to ensure that they fully understand their goals and the impact of their actions, to receive the acknowledgement or guidance they may need, or to gain the sense of empowerment typically associated with PAs. Similarly to Company A, there seem to be two or more systems, one for higher level and one for lower level employees. The process Liz describes of including the lower level employees and training lower level supervisors to conduct PAs indicates a stage of transformation within the company's history. The existence of more than one officially accepted PA procedure within companies can be explained by Bakhtin's (1981) theory that a genre's unity is defined by its chronotope (Crossley, 2007:4). The term "chronotope" literally means "time and space", and refers to the spatio-temporal matrix which is argued to shape narrative texts. Bakhtin (1981) posed that specific chronotopes correspond to specific genres, thus representing particular world views. Scholars view chronotopes as cognitive constructs, as well as narrative features of text or discourse (Bakhtin 1994:246). Using the notion of chronotope one can argue that in company B in spite of this transformation chronotope in the company, Liz's subordinates, for some reason, still have to use an outdated system in terms of technology, as they are still not included in the computerised process Liz is evaluated with. As Liz makes use of PA discussions to train her subordinates and to coach them in the process, it is almost certain that her PAIs are uniquely structured, and she does claim that her PAIs are more centred on giving positive feedback and coaching, than giving negative feedback. After discussing the employee's performance she "quite often and normally" says:

“*Okay, now tell me about you...what’s happening in your life,*” using the PAI not just to discuss performance, but also to build a relationship with the employee. (This function of PAIs will be discussed in more detail in the section 5.2.) Therefore she structures the PAI to be business first, small-talk last, displaying a personal preference for the organisation of PAIs in terms of structural moves. When presented with the role-play scenario, she supports Company A’s belief that all negative feedback should be balanced with positives, but does not reveal more regarding how she would go about structuring the meeting.

Tom provides a concise summary of how he goes about conducting PAIs:

(18)

**Tom:** Ja, with my own employees, firstly we set a date, um, basically I set a list of questionnaires /uh, sorry, a list of questions. The questionnaire then get filled in by the employee ... or my subordinate, uh, I also fill it in then we meet around the table and try to find common ground. We then rate it. It’s on a scale of one to five, um ... and obviously they’ll rate themselves for instance three and I’ll say four and we need to discuss it and decide where we end on. So at the end of the discussion we have a final number.

Tom clearly states that he designs the talking points for the interview and makes no mention of using official company documents or procedures, other than the standard discussion of ratings in a PAI, making it clear that his subordinates also do not participate in the computerised system. He specifically emphasises that he bases his feedback on facts and evidence; thus his PAIs include recapping and discussion, not perceptions but measureable truths.

When Herman, the assistant manager, is asked about PAs, he immediately assumes an informal performance discussion and explains that he and his team have a group meeting every morning to discuss the previous day’s performance. From his words it is evident that these PA discussions entail quite a bit of problem solving. (Here one should be aware of the fact that he is working with lower level employees in the distribution centre in an almost factory-like setting, and that the physical work these employees do differs vastly from the desk jobs of employees in the office building.)

(19)

**Herman:** Feedback on performances?

**T:** Ja.

**Herman:** Normally I had once/ every morning had a meeting, of the previous day's performance. It's a set time that we normally agree with. Book it on a calendar and come to my office, (unclear) all the reports. And normally to introduce/greet them in the morning, and they need to tell me what happened yesterday and from there on we're gonna sit and see how can we deal with th' thing.

**T:** So it's a group meeting with all of them?

**Herman:** That's it. Ja all of them in ... in my office. Uh ... If I want to talk individual with one of the supervisors, I will call them in and start him with a conversation, uh: can you please explain what happened yesterday due to bad ... uh, performing ... and they come with what happened. Then ask them, can you maybe ... inform me that that and that was the problem and that they will might said they forget about it and stuff like that. But it's a nice way/the approaching must be as a manager to the lower/to the supervisor. And it's open to them – that they/most of the time they will talk ... and I will listen.

**T:** Do you ever do bigger, formal performance assessments one-on-one, like once a year or twice a year?

**Herman:** Yes we have the performance appraisal with the supervisors where I normally have the problem in front of me and there's a fixed thing known as your handring (?) and I will just assess them from that and I will give them marks towards that. But how we come to doing that is that they're first gonna score them, I will score them and we go out and we sit and talk one-on-one.

The remainder of Herman's interview mostly indicates the use of typical structural moves (similar to the moves mentioned by other managers of all participating companies), e.g. starting the conversation by making small talk ("we'll start with normally sports ... what did you do last night? ... did you watch this movie?"), acknowledging the good, drawing attention to the bad, explaining the consequences or the impact of the employee's actions. In contrast, though, Herman's account of the conclusion of PAIs is vastly different from the typical endings described by other managers. He mentions (twice) that he will give the employee time to calm down first and then reminds the employee that he/she is welcome to come back at a later stage and discuss the issue further if "they don't feel good about it" as he has an open-door policy.

One of Company B's employees provides further evidence that different departments have different ways of performing PAs. When asked about what a typical PAI constitutes, Peter starts his account with "our department's way..."

### 5.1.3 Company C

As mentioned earlier, Elsabe provides a uniquely mechanical or technical description of PAIs in terms of the rating scales, statistics, figures and documents. This description is contested by Nicola's informal comparison of PAIs to "having a chat about performance". The two managers' descriptions of the structural moves within PAIs are also opposing. Nicola describes her "recipe" for a typical PAI as having a "sandwich" structure:

(20)

**Nicola:** ... I first tell them about their positive points, then I bring in their negative points - where they can improve, but I always end the meeting off with a positive.

However, when presented with the role-play, Nicola immediately addresses the fictional employee's negative performance, assuming that her discussion with the employee is of a more informal nature than the official PAI meeting. We are therefore led to believe that it is quite possible that different structural moves are employed in formal PAI discussions than in informal ad hoc performance discussions.

Elsabe's response differs from Nicola's in the sense that she claims that she would not comment on the employee's positive performance (as provided in the role-play), but would rather deal with the negative performance areas in a straight forward fashion. She states that she would firstly ask for reasons why the employee's performance is not up to standard, then present facts (statistics or figures) to back up her claim that the employee's performance is indeed sub-standard, and finally move on to seeking solutions and giving advice to improve performance. The structure that she sets out here is reflected in her response to the role-play, but she contradicts herself at the end of the interview by mentioning that she would not typically start the meeting with negative feedback, and would instead first make small talk with the employee, e.g. asking about the employee's children<sup>27</sup>. I believe that, in this specific interview, Elsabe initially excluded telling me about making small talk with her employees

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<sup>27</sup> The majority of the employees at Company C are mothers. At the time of the interviews, Elsabe only had two (young) male subordinates in her department.

because she assumed that I was more interested in the business aspects of PAs. Both Elsabe and Nicola added that they would “put it on paper” and let the employee sign, once again reiterating the idea that PAIs are indeed sensitive communicative events, and not mere “normal chats” as described in many of the interviews.

## **5.2 Functions of PAs: Dominant and competing discourses**

This section deals with the functions of the PAI by focusing on the following questions: Why are PAIs such prominent procedures within companies? What (according to the participants) is there to be gained from conducting and participating in PAIs? What, ideally, do the participants wish to achieve, or expect to gain by participating in PAIs? What are the results and the consequences of these discussions? In this section I shall provide an overview of the functions or purpose of PAIs (as a recognised communicative event) as it is understood and communicated by the participating managers and employees (as members of a professional community).

As with the discussion in section 5.1, the data reveals complementing and competing perceptions among the participants regarding the purposes, benefits, and possible consequences of PAIs. This phenomenon is understandable as Bhatia (1996:51) explains that genres are structured and conventionalised in most regards in order to serve a determined communicative purpose, but that they may also be altered (or even exploited) by individual or communal motives in order to fulfil less conventional functions. Thus one can argue that within business organisations actors may have certain generic expectations of standard practices (e.g. PAIs), but that these practices are not necessarily always static in structure and content as they are often modified to fit certain goals or complement specific circumstances or needs. As a result these modified practices may serve to fulfil other purposes or functions than the more generic or conventionalised practices. The data collected for the present study clearly illustrate that an organisation’s specific needs determine the functions that PAIs need to fulfil, consequently leading to discrepancies with regards to the perceived functionality of PAIs. Again it becomes clear that these functions are not generic or representative of an organisation as a whole, but may vary from company to company, from department to department, and from one individual to another.

As described in business management and HR literature, PAIs are commonly used to achieve the greater goal of managing employee performance, outcomes and employee behaviour. To achieve this broader purpose, it is necessary to successfully accomplish a range of specific goals (some generic and some personal) within a PAI. Many of the perceived goals and functions of PAIs were briefly mentioned in section 5.1. The reason for this repetition is that the content, form and function of genres are mutually inclusive; therefore making it difficult to isolate particular focal points of genre analysis for analytical purposes (Bhatia, 1996:54). The discussion of the functions of PAIs will automatically bring to light some perceptions about the successful accomplishment of PAIs, as well as some (communicative / linguistic) strategies employed to achieve the goals of PAIs, i.e. to lead them to function in the intended manner. By concentrating on what exactly each participant within this study typically tries to achieve or hopes to acquire during PAIs, one becomes aware of individual and collective intentions within specific organisations and within the workplace in general. The dominant and competing discourses that emerged regarding participants' perceptions of the functions of PAIs are discussed below.

As a starting point for this discussion it is necessary to take a step back to consider the broadest, overarching assumption regarding PAIs. In response to the question of why PAIs are such prominent procedures within business organisations, the majority of the participants collectively agreed that "it helps". Therefore, the most general and most basic participant assumption, supported across all three participating companies, in concordance with the literature, is that if a PAI "helps", then it must accomplish something. In order for a PAI to be successful, it must subsequently achieve certain goals and satisfy certain needs. Several of the prevailing functions emerging from the data will briefly be discussed to illustrate why PAIs are considered helpful by the majority of the participants. The discussion will also show that not all of these functions are unanimously perceived as relevant or appropriate in certain circumstances.

Across the board the primary function of PAIs is constructed as a forum to discuss employees' ratings and to give feedback in order to enhance performance and enable development. As some of the managers mentioned that they would always try to balance negative feedback with positive feedback, this means that PAIs are functional in acknowledging an employee's strengths and consequently boosting employee confidence, while at the same time drawing attention to performance areas in need of improvement, in

turn facilitating growth and development. The data support the theoretical notion that one of the main functions perceived by participants for discussing an employee's ratings and performance is to determine whether the employee is in need of guidance, support, and further training, thus enabling development. A discussion of the ratings allows actors in a PAI to determine what has been achieved, what has not been achieved, to discuss why something has not (yet) been achieved, and to consider possible solutions. Liz summarises this perceived function of PAIs as follows: "to put a pin in the ground and see where we are – in terms of the past and where we want to be in the future."

This process involves identifying problems as well as setting long term goals for the next year (in the case of more formal, annual PAIs) or short term goals for the immediate future. Very often the manager would use a PAI to arrange a follow-up meeting to evaluate if there has been some form of progress. In severe cases of poor performance, managers would also use PAIs to issue warnings. Finally, PAIs play a vital role in determining, discussing, and negotiating salary increases and bonuses (as discussed in section 5.1). Once again the applicability of Bakhtin's notion of chronotope is evident as PAIs are based on past performance and aimed at improving future performance or planning future happenings, i.e. evaluating, changing and planning performance across time and space. In fact one might argue that chronotopes of transformation and change are very important aspects of PAIs as change, growth and transformation across time is constructed by some to be the very reason of existence of PAIs. Bakhtin proposed that it might be "the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions" in literature (Bakhtin, 1994:184), similarly it seems to be one of the defining characteristics of PAIs. However this construction of PAIs is not universal. Some participants in the study articulated their doubts about the ability of PAIs to enable change across time and space.

Some managers provided their opinions as to why they feel that PAIs are not necessarily as "helpful" in all contexts as others depict them to be:

(21)

**Luke:** ... I also think ... uhm ... on their salary scale, now I mean that's very low, what they earn, and, uhm, sometimes I just, a lot of time uhm, people just treat them also like, and they get that ... uh, in tem: Okay, I'm just a cleaner. Then you just don't wanna grow...

**Izak:** ... uhm ... it's interesting ... helpful ... but, uhm ... a bit frustrating as well, because you give the person ... recognition ... uh ... for ... for for the person's contribution, but, most cases - that is as far as it goes. It's personal growth, there's no ... possible remuneration that goes with it. So, ja ... Because of them falling in a different bracket ... the bargaining unit makes them ... determines their annual increases.

The inherent usefulness of PAIs is thus questioned. The dominant discourse of PAIs as helpful is challenged by this specific example of employees at the lower end of the scale. As Izak states, their increases are already determined by their income bracket, thus not being an incentive to improve their performance. Similarly, Luke explains that lower level employees, e.g. cleaners, may also not be motivated to participate in and achieve much from a PAI as there is almost no possibility of being promoted or moving to another department. Anele also complains that PAIs are highly structured and repetitive, therefore just becoming another task to complete and losing possible benefits as a result. (I shall return to this argument regarding PAIs losing their impact in section 5.3.)

Interestingly, all three of the arguments referred to above come from managers in Company A, the same company responsible for the most favourable accounts of PAIs in this study, thus indicating that discursive struggles do exist within the same company, and even within the same interview transcript (see Izak's transcript). The evidence of multi-discursivity (Bakhtin) in terms of competing discourses within a single interview shows that managers view PAIs as very complex practices. These three managers from Company A mainly focused on the perceived advantages and functions of PAIs throughout the rest of their interviews. This may indicate that theoretically PAIs are considered to be highly valuable, but that this sentiment remains unmatched in practice.

Many managers are in agreement that PAIs are also used to highlight the impact of the employee's performance on his reputation, the team, and the company as a whole. This discussion point consequently functions to emphasise responsibility and accountability. According to the literature, discussions of *impact* of satisfactory performance are usually closely associated with experiencing a sense of employee empowerment, as it makes the employee aware that his performance positively influences the company. In contrast, making the employee aware of the impact of negative performance can be regarded as a method to make them feel guilty or blameworthy for the rest of the department being affected by their

poor performance, thus signifying that the employee is accountable for his/her actions and performance. Numerous examples are available in the data in support of the latter argument:

(22)

**Luke:** I'm trying to get them accountable for what they're doing. You're responsible for it. If something happens ... you need to pay for it, not me, you gonna be responsible, and a lot of them now start to think, uh ... before they use the ... stuff unnecessary, or throw stuff away ... unnecessary.

**(XXX)**

At the end of the day we're still running a company that needs to make money - for us to have a job, and if we don't do that ... if I don't do my bit, the one above me won't be able to do their bit, and in the end we're gonna sit without a job. I'll approach it ... uhm ... tell him the pro's and the cons ... of him doing this, and doing that.

**Izak:** ... Um ... working with that person's employ ... um, contrac' ... employee's contrac', what that person's responsibilities is and rate him on that/ explain to him what a result is – the ripple effec' of complying to deadlines is. And, have that discussion with him, as counselling, first of, explain to him, take him through the necessary, as I said, documents, to have him understand that the ... it's a requirement ... one of the requirements. For him, for him being employed here, that he needs to adhere to, he obviously needs to comply to, if ... he does not comply to deadlines, and taking to many personal days and that type of thing, what result it would uh, what result ... how it will, how it will effect (pronounced this way) him, personally, in terms of unpaid days, uh ...

These excerpts are representative of the common tendency of managers to discuss the impact of *poor* employee performance in an attempt to instil a sense of accountability and responsibility. This practice of making an employee aware of his/her performance's impact in an attempt to emphasise accountability and responsibility was confirmed by the managers from all three of the participating companies, as well as the employees participating in FG2, thus showing that it is widely regarded as a function of PAIs. However, as the focus of these companies is mainly on the *negative* impact of poor performance on a *group*, and not on the positive impact of excellent performance (on a group or on an individual level), the link between discussing impact and employee empowerment seems to be much less significant than depicted by the literature referred to in Chapter 3. In spite of the fact that discussing *impact* within the three competing companies is only weakly linked to the notion of employee

empowerment, other features of PAIs revealed in the data still support the view that PAIs are used as a tool to promote employee empowerment. These features include giving the employee more responsibility based on good performance outcomes, motivating the employee, and encouraging the employee to participate in development courses.

Izak's description of the multiple functions of a PAI is the only example in the data of a manager emphasising that PAIs are also used to make the employee aware of how their actions will influence them *personally* in terms of financial considerations, as opposed to the more popular practice of describing the employee's impact in relation to the company or the team. He also indicates that the manager may use the opportunity to remind the employee of what is expected of him in terms of his employment contract with the company, thus PAIs also function as a platform to revisit legal agreements and the employee's required tasks. Anele points out that PAIs are often functional in ensuring that the company policy is adhered to:

(23)

**Anele:** ... there are discussion where maybe we have to ... deal with conduct, or m/misconduct. And there, we/as much as we want to be sensitive, but we also wan to ... ensure that we keep company rules in place, and/and/and conduct is in line with company culture.

This notion of PAIs being governed by "what the company requires" and not by what the individual needs, is also communicated by Tom:

(24)

**Tom:** Wow, okay, so obviously the interest of the company comes first here ...

The discussion of emphasising company policy and communicating other goals within these meetings often requires a prevailing strategy, i.e. for managers to ensure that PAIs are performed in such a manner that employees do not perceive negative feedback as a personal attack, and to understand that the feedback is delivered in good will, for the greater good of the company, and to *help* the employee improve and develop – see, for example, David's comment in (25) below.

(25)

**David:** ... and it helps that person understand that you're not attacking the person, 'specially when there's negative feedback. You're attacking the situation ...

The handling of such potentially face threatening acts (FTAs) often requires the use of politeness strategies, as is clear from Izak's explanation in (26).

(26)

**Izak:** I ... I always think that ... that uhm ... when you have negative feedback, it's also good to ... highlight some positives. And, then uhm, also comment on the negatives, and make the person aware of the concern with regard to the negatives. And that it's not the ... individual, but rather the action, that causes, uh, the possible negativity, or ... uh ... poor performance. Could be based on: this is lacking due to ... you not ... paying enough attention ... to a particular instance, or that type of thing ... so, make the person aware that it's not a personal thing, it's rather uh ... uh ... uhm ... something that was not implemented properly, and that it can be developed, or worked on, or improved, and ja, so it's rather the action ... I would rather address the action, than the person.

Izak explains that he would place greater emphasis on the positive feedback (i.e. "highlight some positives"), and that negatives will be "commented" on – downplaying the importance of this part of the PAI. Already he reveals that he would use the popular management strategy of balancing negatives with positives. He then makes use of the strategy of drawing the employee's attention to the area that is in need of improvement, instead of accusing or assigning blame to the individual, therefore attempting not to make the feedback come across as a personal attack. However, in his example of how he would convey negative feedback, he does not succeed in distancing the individual from the action, since he uses "due to you not paying enough attention", which accomplishes exactly the opposite of what he intended by blaming the individual for the unsatisfactory action.

The same discursive struggle became noticeable in Anele's interview – see (27):

(27)

**Anele:** ... you are good in this area, and that this area is for improvement, so it's seen as an area of improvement, so, it's not delivered as a negative. (XXX) ... For example, we would say:

You're doing your work with excellence, but maybe we need to improve your attitude, or your attendance, absenteeism doesn't look well - you're rated lower there.

Anele is trying to communicate that she would focus on the area that needs improvement, claiming that it is not seen as “a negative”, but, just like Izak, when she provides an example of how she would convey negative feedback, she does exactly the opposite of what she proposes by telling the employee that his/her attitude needs improvement, addressing a very personal and sensitive issue head on with very little hedging, leaving the comment to remain face threatening.

The excerpt in (28) below is taken from Elsabe's response to the question of what exactly constitutes a successful PAI. Like Izak and Anele, Elsabe states that the success of the meeting lies in getting the employee to understand that she is not personally attacking the person but that “we actually need to address the work performance that's not up to standard”. When asked how she would do this, she answers:

(28)

**Elsabe:** (laughing) ... uh ... I ... I ... try to explain to them that it's ... what is our company goal, and I need everyone's uh ... input, and support, and we are like a team, and ... or it's like a marriage, it can't work if there's communication from both sides<sup>28</sup> ... or I can't perform if they don't support and perform as well. I try to uh ... get to an angle ... where I need them ... to be the best, so that we can be the best.

Elsabe's habit of approaching performance discussions by applying certain “angles” is in direct contrast with all the participating employees from Company C's desire for “straightforward” communication. Once again, a conflict is revealed in the PA discourse produced by managers and employees. The excerpt in (28) makes it seem as if transparency is compromised and negotiation is more manipulative than fair. The idea that she has to wheedle the employees into cooperating, raises the question: Why does she feel that she cannot use a more straightforward, rational approach? Does this indicate a communication problem within the company? From the rest of Elsabe's interview I assume that what she

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<sup>28</sup> Given the rest of this excerpt (and of the interview as a whole), it is highly unlikely that Elsabe meant to say “it can't work if there's communication from both sides”, and it is much more likely that this is a simple speech error and that she meant to say “... if there *isn't* communication from both sides”. It should, of course, also be taken into account that her L1 is Afrikaans, not English, and that errors in spontaneous speech are much more frequent in L2 than in L1 speech.

meant by this explanation is not that she is necessarily trying to be deceptive, but that she knows her employees and she anticipates their responses, therefore she knows how to approach them. She states in the interview that employees often have emotional outbursts as they work with “high volumes” each day. This process of anticipation and strategising once again shows that PAIs are complex and sensitive activities. Consequently, a certain amount of face-work is required, especially pertaining to negative feedback.

From the data it is evident that participants believe that a successful PAI involves not only reaching the relevant communicative goals but also doing so in a way that is socially acceptable, and that this is made possible by employing certain linguistic strategies. Such strategies include: positive politeness strategies (e.g. congratulating an employee on areas in which performance was above-average), negative politeness strategies (e.g. acknowledging the employee’s need for respect), avoiding or minimising FTAs (e.g. focusing on the action and not the individual by making the area in need of improvement the subject of the discussion), juxtaposing the positives with the negatives (so that the negatives are seen as part of the bigger picture), hedging (i.e. “toning down” unpleasant messages), making use of varying levels of directness (especially in conveying an unpleasant message), opting not to respond to certain comments at all, choosing specific vocabulary items over others, using specific opening and closing sequences, turn-taking (e.g. trying to encourage the employee to participate in the PAI, handing the floor over to them), being aware of one’s tone (e.g. avoiding sarcasm), requesting and providing clarification (in order to avoid miscommunication), code-switching (especially when this means accommodating the employee in cases where their proficiency in the company’s lingua franca is limited), and playful “manager talk” (see (29) below). The specific selection of strategies available may depend on managerial styles and motives. It should thus be clear that the functionality of PAIs is deeply intertwined with linguistic strategy.

Nicola (one of the team leaders in Company C) is more explicit about the “angle” she takes (i.e. the strategies that she uses) when facilitating performance discussions with employees. She reiterates the idea that PAIs are used to “manipulate” employees’ strengths, although defending her comment by explaining that focusing “on their strong points” makes the meeting more “enjoyable” and makes “work fun”. She argues that “you get things out of people” and “you get what you want out of them”:

(29)

**Nicola:** Sometimes it can get a bit ... very seldom it gets a bit irritating for them. Um ... but ... I would say ... 98% of the time? ... they ... they love it. They ... they ... ja. Because I've I've I've – like I say – everybody has got a strong point – it's about finding that strong point, and obviously manipulating that strong point. (XXX) You know ... uhm ... I'm a firm believer that you get things out of people ... a lot better ... you know, you get what you want out of them, if you listen to what they've got to say ... and you make work fun, if you make it enjoyable, tease the, oh, you look great, fabulous, there we go ... uhm ... I try to sort of do the whole pep talk thing where it boots their spirits and stuff, so ... I mean ... anybody wants to come to work in the mornings and then they see, oh wow, my boss thinks I'm great. Everybody wants that and I think it's important – important to boost people's spirit. (XXX) ... they like coming to work, they like doing the job they do, and I know at one stage they actually said to the boss: we're not doing it for you, we're doing it for Nicola. So I think it's important – you've gotta – you've gotta ... make your workplace ... enjoyable ... fun ... happy.

The excerpt above reflects Nicola's absolute confidence in the way she conducts PAIs. She believes that she gets the results she wants, confirming that she definitely regards PAIs as useful. She describes a number of specific linguistic strategies she employs to achieve particular goals, e.g. complimenting her subordinates, giving pep talks, playfully teasing the employees, and continually emphasising their positive attributes in order to make their environment more enjoyable (all of which involve positive politeness strategies). A certain smugness is palpable as she continues to tell how much her team members enjoy coming to work due to her effective "manipulation" skills. When Nicola says "they actually said to the boss: we're not doing it for you, we're doing it for Nicola", it almost seems as if the managers are participating in a covert popularity contest, and the intention behind PAIs is possibly more self-serving than for the greater good of the company. Nicola interprets the employees' performance as a gesture to please her, and not as participation in a team that is working to achieve a common goal. As indicated, her strategies fall outside of the conventional content and structure associated with the PAI genre, showing that atypical forms and approaches are used to communicate "private intentions with the rhetorical context of a socially recognized communicative goal" (Bhatia,1996:39). It becomes clear that PAIs are thus not always performed for "common goals" – some discourses reveal that PAIs sometimes have self-serving functions, or "private intentions" as Bhatia puts it.

Another general perspective to be presented as a dominant function of PAIs is that performance discussions serve to enhance communication between managers and employees, in turn facilitating a relationship between the actors. Both managers and employees from Companies A and B place great emphasis on the importance of two-way communication, not only in PAIs, but in the workplace in general. The majority of managers indicate that they welcome and invite employee participation in meetings as meetings are generally deemed to be more successful when involving employee participation. This “open communication” enables managers to understand employees better, and to gain insights about possible hurdles or struggles in the workplace. This notion of active participation and open communication is greatly supported by the participants of FG2, although they do not necessarily attribute these aspects to being a function of the PAI, and instead credit their work environment for the communication lines in place.

In contrast, the employees of Company C unanimously communicate that they have no desire to participate in performance discussions; in fact, they express a strong desire for PAIs to be over and done with as soon as possible. This reaction tells us that they either do not attribute any significance to such a discussion, i.e. that there is nothing worth gaining from such a discussion, or that they perceive them as highly unpleasant (contradicting what Nicola says about her employees “loving it” 98% of the time). Neither of these possibilities is conducive to building better relationships between managers and employees. Thus it can be argued that for these employees PAIs have very little function.

The following three excerpts ((30) to (32)) are taken from Lisa, Marike, and Leon’s (Company C) interview transcripts. I asked each employee how he/she would typically respond in a PA discussion when receiving feedback from their manager.

(30)

**Lisa:** *Baie dankie*, (“Thank you very much”) and that’s about it!

**T:** Okay, *en* (“and”) how do you respond to negative feedback, when they’re not happy with what you’re doing or they suggest you do something else ...?

**Lisa:** *Ek sit en kyk hulle gewoonlik net aan, en dan staan ek maar op en loop ek.* (“I usually just sit and stare at them, and then I get up and walk away.”)

**T:** (*laughing*) *Sal jy niks sê nie?* (“Won’t you say anything?”)

**Lisa:** *Nee* (“No”) (*laughing*) ... *mag dalk die verkeerde ding wees om te sê* ... (“may be the wrong thing to say”)

**T:** Okay, *so dis better om stil te bly*. (“so it is better to be quiet.”)

**Lisa:** *Nee, stilbly is ook ‘n antwoord* (“No, silence is also an answer”) ... (*laughing*)

(31)

**Marike:** well, you sit back ... you look at her, and you just take it all in, um, you nod. (*laughing*) ‘Cause that’s all that you can do. (XXX) But you shut your mouth and you do your work. Great company – work’s scarce – go on.

(32)

**Leon:** ... thank you!

**T:** Okay, and how do you respond to negative feedback ... when they’re not happy with what you’re doing or expect more from you?

**Leon:** Ah, apologise for the inconvenience ... uh, I’ll try my best.

**T:** (*laughing*) Okay, so you leave with apologies and promises?

**Leon:** If it’s for the clients: I apologise for the inconvenience, if it’s for the manager: I’ll try my best next time.

**T:** Okay, how would you ideally want a manager to give you negative feedback?

**Leon:** Just straight forward. Just tell me straight forward. (XXX) As long as it’s short and sweet, and everything is discussed, points-wise, then it’s all good.

Lisa and Marike’s answers (in (30) and (31), respectively) reveal that (similarly to Wayne’s response – see section 6.2.1.4) they just want to get up and leave after the meeting with no intent or desire to engage in a discussion about the feedback they received, or their performance and possible development. Lisa has a standard response to positive feedback (*baie dankie* “thank you very much”), but chooses to remain silent after receiving negative feedback. She includes a non-verbal response action as well, i.e. *staring* at the managers, which is typically associated with a negative attitude. She states that she knows that silence is also an answer, indicating that she is well aware of the fact that her body language is sending the message that she is unhappy with the situation. Instead of verbally addressing her unhappiness, she chooses not to further engage in the process. This reaction (or lack of reaction) could be attributed to the fact that she does not regard a PAI as a platform for social interaction, does not want to prolong the meeting, or quite possibly does not see the value in having such a discussion with her manager. The fact that she makes no attempt to gain

anything from the PAI might also indicate that she feels that her contributions have not had any effect in the past. The only thing that is evidently achieved by Lisa through this approach is expressing that she is disgruntled with the appraisal procedure.

Marike's answer (in (31)) took me by surprise as it is in direct contrast to the image that she creates of the company in the rest of her interview, where she continuously reiterates the idea that she is happy at the company, she is satisfied with the PA process, and she appreciates the way in which PAIs are conducted. She also states that the communication in the meeting is quite comfortable as she has a good relationship with her manager. Earlier in her interview transcript there is evidence of her associating feedback during PAIs with "improvement" and feeling that managers use PAIs to "encourage" employees and that they are "not bringing you down". Marike's interview transcript provides yet another example of Bakhtin's multi-discursivity in discourse. It should be mentioned here that she is currently a part-time student completing a business course, and that most of her answers reflect typical text-book influence (in terms of vocabulary, communication theory, and knowledge specific to PAs). The excerpt in (31) constitutes a rare reflection of her personal perceptions and personal experiences that emerged during the interview. As can be seen in this excerpt, the routine that Marike describes as her response to negative feedback is very similar to Lisa's: she also responds non-verbally with a nod. Her answer seems less aggressive than Lisa's, as she says that she "looks" at the managers, in contrast to Lisa's "stares". Furthermore, she does not just get up and walk out, as Lisa does, but nods, acknowledging that she is listening and understands the feedback. When she says that this is "all that you can do", though, this makes one doubt the sincerity of her actions. Again the idea is created that her response is the only response available to her, that it has proven to be the only acceptable response (possibly through past experience, as she has been with the company for six years). Therefore we can assume that this reaction is masking either negative emotions or indifference, and that it does not necessarily indicate a focused interest and absorption of the feedback that she is receiving.

Leon's answer (in (32)) also reveals that he has a response template which he uses to react to the negative or positive feedback he receives (emphasising the ritualised nature of the interaction) and he includes an example of his preference for the meeting to consume as little time as possible. This desire is expressed a number of times during our interview, and is also reflected in our interview in the sense that he insisted that I start with the questioning while he was still completing the background questionnaire. His answers are quite concise and

typically no longer than a sentence. He only elaborates on statements when specifically probed to do so. Here it should be noted that all interviews conducted in Company C were much shorter than the interviews in the other two companies, and Leon's interview was by far the shortest of all participants'. The hurried nature caused the interview to be more like a survey and less like a semi-structured discussion. This again illustrates that in Company C employees have no desire (or time) to converse with others (including co-workers, management, or intruding researchers), and that they wish to be nowhere else than at their desks, working.

The overwhelming tendency for PAIs in this company to be a one-sided, non-interactive event is not only clear from the employee interview transcripts. The two participating managers from this company also allude to PAIs in a similar light: their descriptions of PAIs lack details involving or inviting employee participation and therefore fail to depict the PAI as an event characterised by two-way communication. It is quite evident then that PAIs cannot be said to have fixed generic goals and communicative purposes across companies or even within companies. Although some functions are shared, there are also some functions that are driven from an individual perspective and some individuals even construct PAIs as *passé*, with no function whatsoever.

Nicola adds another function of PAIs, supporting Fairclough's notion that genres are used to maintain social practices:

(33)

**Nicola:** Look, 'cause it will go well for a couple of months then it will start up again. So you've constantly gotta keep ... k ... keep them in line, keep on meeting with them and keep on saying like ... you know ...

This perspective on PAIs is an example of a regulatory discourse pertaining to PAIs. The idea of maintaining and monitoring performance is also supported by managers of other companies:

(34)

**Luke:** If you give them positive feedback, they're very happy, but as soon as it's negative, they're very negative and you need to watch them all the time. (XXX) ... sometimes it's not

even quarterly, because normally when you get the, the bad apple ... you have it on a weekly basis. (XXX) ... but if I don't follow up, they won't do it.

In (33) and (34) above, two managers – Nicola from Company C and Luke from Company A – explain that PAIs allow them to “keep them in line,” meaning that by having recurring opportunities to address poor performance or undesired employee behaviour, they are able to manage the outcomes they desire (and what is expected by their own managers) within their teams, once again enforcing the idea that “it helps”. The excerpts above strengthen the postulation that PAIs are indeed a professional genre as these goal-orientated interactions need to transpire repetitively in order to be fully functional.

All of these commonalities and discrepancies in terms of the perceived functions of PAIs across the three participating companies, confirm that these practices encompass certain generic elements, a range of linguistic strategies determined by the intended function, and ritualised exchanges, thus showing that PAIs are a conventionalised, albeit flexible, communicative event.

### **5.3 PAs and social practices**

Up to this point the dissertation has clearly placed PAIs as central to the larger organisational structure of PAs, but PAIs are also closely related to other social practices within each company. From the interviews we learn that PAIs are connected to practices such as group and individual meetings, translation and interpreting, investigations (in serious cases), award ceremonies, and administration (e.g. keeping a paper trail, emails, documentation, completing online questionnaires). I would, however, like to argue that PAIs are not just connected to other practices, but that they possibly influence the way things are done within a company (practices and behaviour), while simultaneously being influenced by the way things are done in the company. For instance, it does not come as a surprise that a community priding themselves on an open door policy, transparency, two-way communication, and an inclusive company culture, describes PAIs as characteristic of open and free communication, often comparing these performance discussions to “just a normal chat” (see excerpts from FG2). In contrast, groups who do not testify to the existence of such open communication channels and inclusiveness, more often state that they experience emotional reactions to performance

discussions, e.g. feeling sad or nervous (see excerpts from FG1), or even angry and embarrassed (see, for example, excerpts from Wayne’s transcript).

Another point for consideration is the *value* attached to the actual PAI discussion by different actors within an organisation. Below is an example of a manager (Anele) indicating that, once again, the manager’s handling of a PAI determines the value the meeting holds, explaining that PAIs could easily become inconsequential:

(35)

**Anele:** ... well, it’s very ... structured. Um.... i/it can also be seen as just the run of the mill, you know another...f/form to tick. It may lose, uh, you know, the/its impact or design. So the best thing is to ... see as a manager, *do* your own initiatives, to say: how can I make it lively?

The participating employees in FG2 attribute little significance to the actual practice of conducting PAIs, but in their case it is not because they are uninterested in discussing their performance, growth, development, two-way communication or building a relationship with their superiors (as expressed by, for example, the employees from Company C); instead, they feel that these needs are already satisfied by the nature of their company culture, therefore rendering the PAI redundant. Their focus group discussion specifically uses the example of employee empowerment to communicate their feelings of the decreased value of PAIs. The example in (36) is illustrative of this point.

(36)

**Alice:** ... we talk about things in an ongoing basis, so it’s more about like and informal discussion about weekend plans – no, I’m just joking ... work does get discussed.

The term “empowerment” was explicitly used in FG2, but the majority of participants implicitly touched on one or more of the four cognitions of empowerment theory as proposed by Thomas and Velthouse (1990), as well as on some of the empowerment antecedents discussed by Sharma and Kaur (2011). Note that the interview schedule was not designed to test empowerment theories or to specifically elicit data on employee empowerment; however, several empowerment aspects emerged spontaneously during the interviews. Based on the magnitude of direct and indirect empowerment related references in the data, I argue that the

link between performance discussions and employee empowerment is an undisputed reality within the participating companies and therefore cannot be ignored in this discussion.

Consider the co-constructed answer in (37) below which followed the question “How do you respond to positive feedback, for example when your manager compliments you on the efficient way that you manage your tasks, or he praises you or compliments you for the quality of your work?”

(37)

**Harry:** Well you ... obviously you/you'd be motivated to do what you do, and even ... strive to do better in that. But ja, that ... I think th/that would be the general um, reaction ...

(XXX)

**Alice:** I would give a compliment back: you are such a good employer, or you are such a good manager ... then everybody feels happy. (*laughing*)

**Nora:** Aaah ... I tend not to do that. The reason why I don't do that is, you know, you always get yourself in situation where ... we never stand up and ... pat ourselves on the back. It's a difficult thing to do. (others agree) Although we know we do an excellent job, it's very difficult to stand out there and say: oh wow, I'm the best. I am the greatest, I have achieved this. When you hear that, we tend to ... get/ you feel so shy ... a/a/a/it's a silly/ it's a silly reaction, but I think we get giddy... (XXX) ... people praise you for job well done, and the first thing that you do is not say yeah ... 'cause we're not/we not/ we not ... we don't want to be proud, we don't wanna seem ... (XXX) ... the back of the mind you know that you worked extremely hard ... to get there ... and this is the results that we wanted ... um, but we tend to shy away from it ... so I think I've made the mental shift – not to say that yes, um, I'm a proud person, but I acknowledge now where I succeed.

**Harry:** mmmm (agrees)

**Nora:** And I think that's how you stimulate your growth. 'Cause when you acknowledge you know what, I know I did a good job, but ... um ... thank you for noticing and/and I think what (XXX) Harry said/sorry, is absolutely correct – um, when you get acknowledged for that it's ... it motivates you to do ... much ... much more. So ... ah, catch 22 ... um, yes ... we/ we all tend to do that: ah, thank you, thank you so much, but you know you a good leader ... that is why I do that – No! It's not about the good leader – it's you! (*laughing*)

**Harry:** You see, at the end of the day ... despite the fact that the/ I mean he's your leader, but um ... but if you/ if you did something well ... you should get recognition for that. Because now, it's almost like – if he say's well done ... you/you more ... or some people tend to ... to ... to react more to the fact that your manager said that, but you know, for yourself, that you did well

in doing whatever you did, so ... um ... that doesn't ... make it ...better ... for him to ... to recognise your achievements. (XXX) It's/it's your achievement. You achieved it. And he ... he/yes he did recognise it, but don't feel good about yourself because he recognised it. It's/it's something you done on your own.

**Ben:** I personally see it as a deeper thing: I don't know ... obvious it depends on the/on your leader. (XXX) There's a part where we given responsibility for/for a department or for a task. They give you full responsibility. And that responsibility involves ... accountability ... (others 'mmmm' in agreement) Now with that in mind ... if you do a task ... correctly, and achieve that ... desired results – You reall/you really, for yourself, you *really* achieved ... even some if your leader come and tell you ...it/it's like a plus to that. You 'ready probably celebrated ... by yourself. But your leader ... just makes it verbally ... so

**Nora:** ... confirms it, ja.

**Ben:** So for me ... I'll always react by just smiling, and just say thank you ... because

**T:** thank you, but I know already...?

**ALL:** (*laughter*) Ja

**Ben:** ... task was accomplished. So the leader just says it verbally, or probably sometimes to the team – he'll say: well done to so and so. You already know, probably already talked to your colleagues ...

**Nora:** Exactly.

**Ben:** ... I did this thing. But by the time you leader says it, just say: okay.

**Joe:** It's just a confirmation, ja.

**Ben:** ... he noticed or she noticed, and I'll just say: thank you. Just smile and say thank you. That's ... I think ... I think all fall in the culture of the company. That's how ... we have empowered personally ... so ... by the time you get to that point, you ready achieved ... you ready celebrated ... you already gone for dinner for that ... (*laughter*)

**Harry:** you already had your whiskey... (*laughter*)

The excerpt above provides us with a list of tellings of reactions and deliberations to positive feedback. Firstly, Harry states that the assumed general reaction is to feel motivated to continue doing well. Alice then tells how she would ritually compliment her manager in return, attributing her good performance to the good leadership that she has received from the manager. Nora interjects by disagreeing with the manner in which Alice responds to positive feedback. She tells of having made a mental shift of shying away from praise to owning the compliments directed at her and being proud of what she has achieved. Thereafter Harry and Ben echo each other's feelings that positive feedback from the manager does not really mean much as they already know what they have achieved, and they have probably already

discussed and celebrated their accomplishments before the manager has time to commend them on their work. Joe then speaks up for the first time, agreeing that one should not feel good about the feedback as it is mere confirmation. Their overall view on the matter can be summarised as not feeling good because you received praise, but feeling good, and proud, knowing that you succeeded in something that you were accountable for.

These tellings of personal reactions to feedback received from management touch on several different aspects of empowerment, such as empowerment climate, motivation, self-esteem, and competence. In the way that Nora, Harry and Ben dominate the conversation, it becomes clear that they definitely experience a sense of empowerment at work. Ben is the only one to use the word “empowerment” explicitly. He also uses the term when asked how he perceives PA discussions in general:

(38)

**Ben:** It's/it's/it's, uh ... it's uh, I think sh/she/she has mentioned it, Nora's mentioned that it's open door policy. So if you feel there's something ... trouble you enough – it's easy, go to your manager. So when you get to a 360 ... some of these problem - already resolved by that time, so really you ... individual 'ready know – that's my witness. And by the time you discuss, you 'ready know, you 'ready have a solution to it – what I need to do to solve my / so really ... getting that form is just to ... just to have it on paper, but otherwise ... all the matters have been discussed ... beforehand. So some as that ... as mentioned, the culture, makes it easier for you to address the issue before you even get to your manager ... and helping ... so you're 'ready empowered by the time you get to the 360.

Ben constantly refers to being empowered as a result of the company culture. As stated in Chapter 3, optimal employee empowerment is only possible in an empowerment climate. The presence of such a climate within this company is mentioned in the excerpt above, and in several other instances within the focus group discussion. This company culture is frequently described as a “lovely culture” that they are constantly trying to “feed and nurture”, and “promote”. Claims are made that their company culture is “big in the workplace”, and that they are “different” from other retailers in that they have a company culture “in place”:

(39)

**Nora:** The workplace culture allows for that. That we've got that thing ... that in place. A lo/lot of other retailers, other companies do have that in place ... um ... but that's just a form that's there, this is actually part of the culture. So ... it part of our growth and it part of your performance and ...

In (39) Nora explains that PAIs are not dreaded by the employees, as they see it as a part of their “growth” and “performance”. She attributes the fact that issues that need to be resolved can be openly discussed, to their company culture. According to the literature, an empowerment climate involves certain organisational structures, such as information sharing, team accountability, promoting autonomy, and goal setting. During the discussion in FG2, the company culture is frequently described in relation to concepts such as “open door policy”, “transparency” and “no hidden agendas”, all indicating communication channels for information sharing and making it easier to “address issues”. Ben regards these communication channels as a “witness” (see (38) above), which indicates a sense of security and once again empowers him in the sense that when he walks into his 360 meeting, he walks in not as a vulnerable employee who may be taken by surprise by his performance evaluation, but as a confident man who has already addressed his problems and found solutions for them. Therefore he regards the actual 360 meeting as a ritual, a box that needs to be ticked, a form that needs to be completed, but other than that, the actual 360 meeting holds very little value in terms of his actual performance. Thus he does not regard the actual 360 meeting as a motivational mechanism, or as an enhancer of performance or empowerment. Instead he attributes these functions to the empowerment climate of the company culture. In this company, for these individuals, it seems that the specific genre of PAIs is seen to only minimally be part of the social practice of empowerment. The general PA programme and the general culture of the company play a much larger role in the social practice of empowerment than the actual PAI.

A major discursive distortion is revealed between FG1 and FG2, but the distortion does not involve competing discourses; instead, it involves the fact that there is hardly any overlap between the discourses emerging from two groups from the same company, working in the same building. All three excerpts from FG2 above illustrate the employees' conviction of the importance of an empowerment climate and the existence of such a company culture in their workplace. This strong sense of employee empowerment and company culture is, however,

completely lacking in FG1. Consider the following response by FG1 to the question “How do you feel when discussing your performance with your manager?”:

(40)

**Bill:** Uh ... sometimes if you ... uh ... know what is ... what is wrong ... so you feel nervous sometimes (XXX) ... nervous

**Amy:** I will think you have more respect ... for the person that's being your manager. It will be a formal ... discussion. You know, but more relaxed, also. In that sense.

**T:** Are you usually excited about these kinds of meeting, or do you dread them?

**Amy:** No, I think it's more reality – you need to know how your performance/how you are doing in the company as well ... (everyone agrees, no other opinions expressed)

Unlike the participants in FG2, this group does not use phrases like “open door policy”, “transparency”, or even “360”. The only person in the group who does display some knowledge of this vocabulary is Mary, the only manager present in the group. Bill's response indicates that he perhaps does not have the opportunity to address and solve problems with the help of his manager before their PA discussion; instead, he nervously awaits the evaluation. Amy's contribution is vague and non-committal to expressing her personal perceptions of PA discussions. Her mention of having “more respect” for the “person being your manager” contradicts (at surface level) FG2's sense of disregard for management's input in terms of individual empowerment and achievement.

Amy again supports the idea that this specific group of employees does not know what to expect during their PAs when she describes the PAI as a reality check, an actual recap of her performance of which she would not be aware if it were not for these PA discussions. Thus the notion of an open flow of communication or information sharing seems foreign in this regard. Mary does bring up having the opportunity for open communication or two-way communication later on in the discussion (specifically pertaining to the question of factors leading to a successful PA discussion). Her contribution is however met with silence from the rest of the participants, and Amy then turns the conversation back to having “respect” and conducting PAs in a “friendly manner”.

The overall brevity and lack of participation in FG1's response is surprising in comparison to FG2's response. Considering data from the rest of the discussion, it is evident that FG1 does

not experience the same sense of employee empowerment because they are not exposed to the same processes within the company. They do not indicate an awareness of the “lovely company culture” described in FG2 or knowledge of the company-specific vocabulary used in FG2. Neither do they even remotely display the slightest hint of what could be bordering on egotism. The participants in FG1 all agree that the correct reaction to positive feedback is to politely say “thank you” and to “feel happy”. In response to negative feedback they will say “I will work on it”, often coupled with feelings of sadness. This kind of emotional response to feedback is in direct contrast with the responses offered by FG2. What emerges is that for this specific focus group, it seems as if PAIs form part of the social practice of evaluation much more than empowerment. For different groups and individuals in the group this specific genre forms part of a different social practice, not at all the monolithic response offered by the company managers at first.

Issues such as not feeling worthy and not fitting in to the environment are also touched on by Amy. These perceptions of “fitting in” and membership will be discussed in Chapter 6.

#### **5.4 Summary**

In accordance with Bhatia’s discussion of professional genres it was found that PAIs in three participating companies are largely perceived to have common structures and functions. The specific PAI methods and perceptions of PAIs within each company are closely related to social practices and relationships within each participating company. As predicted, the data also show that PAIs are sites of struggle as varying (and often competing) voices emerge in PAI discourses. Possible explanations for these variations include the specific functions to be accomplished by PAIs in specific teams or departments, the process of transformation within the workplace, and the spatio-temporal contexts in which the PAI is performed. It is also clear from the data that individual managerial styles may influence the structural organisation of PAIs, as well as the linguistic strategies used in PAIs. The discussion in this chapter has made it clear that a PAI is not “just a normal chat” as initially described by several participants, but can rather be described as a highly complex and sensitive communicative event and professional genre. The discussion also highlighted quite clearly that lower level employees have limited access to the practice of PAs and therefore also have limited access to shape the genre of PAIs in specific ways. This brings us to the question of membership and identity, which is the focal point of Chapter 6.

## Chapter 6

### **The Role of Language in the Construction and Management of Identity and Membership in a Community of Practice**

Traditionally, focusing on a CofP entails focusing on what members do. When approaching a CofP from a linguistic point of view, though, the focus shifts to what members say, or rather, how they act within a group, and belong to a group, through discourse (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999:175). This chapter thus focuses on the complex task of identity construction and management within a professional context by means of linguistic behaviour, and explores to what extent individuals construct themselves to be part of a CofP. The chapter not only provides personal insights on membership and participation within a group, but also on the CofP as a whole. Specific attention will be given to the role that *language* plays in expressing and influencing membership. For the purpose of answering research questions 3 and 4, I will explore the notion of *language* and the company. Three different considerations of language are of interest: the company language policy, negotiating language as a means of belonging, and using language to express group and individual identity.

Once again it will become evident that participants have competing views regarding the role that language plays in the workplace, and, more specifically, in terms of belonging to a CofP. These competing views reveal yet another discursive struggle within business organisations. Subsequently identity, specifically group identity, will be further examined as a site of discursive struggle.

#### **6.1 Communities and their members**

As explained in section 3.2.5, my aim is not to label each company as a CofP since there is a lack of clarity regarding the spatial reach of such a community. Instead, I work from the assumption that whether the entire company is a CofP, or a constellation of CofPs, each participant within this study is a member of one or more groups, and an outsider to one or more groups. In addition to the participants' expressions of membership identity (which will be discussed below), the notion of belonging to a CofP is continuously reinforced throughout the data by references to regular interaction and social relationships among individuals within

these companies, displaying evidence of shared repertoires, experiences, knowledge, methods of problem-solving, and engaging in informal learning.

### **6.1.1 Membership categories**

Within a CofP individuals can be positioned anywhere from being an outsider to being a core member. Within this range a number of categories exist pertaining to the individual's degree of membership, e.g. full members, marginal members, and peripheral members. Members of a CofP may also be categorised based on their function within the group, e.g. gatekeeper, mentor or leader; or on the length of their membership, e.g. old-timers and newcomers. Some of these labels are quite obvious and need little explanation; others are not as easily defined or determined (see sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.5 for clarification of the concepts *peripheral membership* and *gatekeeping*). Wenger dedicated the majority of his work to the notion of a CofP. In his earlier work, he claimed that CofPs develop spontaneously (Lave and Wenger, 1991; 1998a); later he acknowledged that CofPs can also be managed and maintained through formal organisational structures (Wenger, 1998; Wenger and Snyder, 2000). However, several criticisms have been levelled against his findings, leaving some aspects of this theory to remain vague or unclear, e.g. exactly how individuals become members, how they interpret their membership, and which factors possibly prohibit or hinder their membership. For a detailed discussion on the critiques against Wenger's CofP theory, see section 3.2.5.

### **6.1.2 Expressions of varying degrees of membership: Luke's small story of *not really part of us***

As a starting point for the investigation of membership within a CofP, I would like to provide an example of a small story as it naturally occurred in the data, not only to be representative of the kind of tellings that emerged in the data, but also to illustrate how identities and degrees of membership are constructed within these tellings, and also to clarify how SSA was used to make sense of these tellings. The concept of SSA was discussed in Chapter 2 and the use thereof (specifically in the present study) was explicated in Chapter 4. SSA contributed to the analysis in Chapter 5 and serves as the main tool of inquiry for Chapter 6; hence the following detailed example of analysis.

Luke, a manager at Company A, provides a small story when he is asked if he thinks that *culture* influences the communication (specifically during PAIs) within his group. Before turning to the small story, some background needs to be provided.

**Background**

Luke was born in the Western Cape, raised by Afrikaans-speaking parents and educated in Afrikaans schools. He spent 25 years of his adult life in a military environment where everyone was instructed to communicate in English at all times. He has also been married to an English woman for the last 25 years and consequently claims to be most comfortable in English, although Afrikaans is his mother tongue. He has been with Company A for just over a year and his position can be described as lower-mid level management. The team he supervises are probably the lowest level employees in the company (the service assistants) and he regularly engages in PAIs with them. During the interview I asked him if he thought that language and culture influenced the effectiveness of communication during such PA discussions. His initial answer was only focussed on language related issues that he was experiencing in his diverse team. He enforced the idea of a divided team repeatedly throughout the interview. (I shall return to this issue at a later stage in the analysis.) Thereafter, I reiterated the question of whether culture also influences communication in the workplace; this time he dealt with the question by telling the small story set out below.

**Luke's Small Story**

- 1     **Luke:** I think yes,
- 2     culture's got a uh uhm, a lot of things that ...
- 3     I don't know if you've ever been to Khayelitsha?
- 4     And I don't know if I'm going off the track ... ?
- 5     **T:** No, it's fine
- 6     **Luke:** Uhm ...we had a project running in Khayelitsha,
- 7     and I'm the only guy ... in my team, that has a licence.
- 8     So I need to take them all the time.
- 9     And one thing that I've noticed is – I was always treated ... um,
- 10    a lot of times (unclear) treated from them, like ... you're the leader, not really part of us.
- 11    And, um, I could feel it.
- 12    But I know, I knew that for years already-they don't allow anybody really as them.
- 13    I'm talking specifically about the Black men.
- 14    And I went with them one day there,
- 15    and then one of the guys on the way back said to me just stop,
- 16    I want to buy some something to eat,
- 17    and now obviously they braai on the ... on the street.

18 I said okay I stopped. And I got out of there / out of the car,  
19 I went there and they bought the stuff.  
20 (Long pause).  
21 And I could see they were watching me: I'm gonna eat with them.  
22 And I started to eat with them. And the / their attitudes change.  
23 They allow ... and I think, by doing  
24 that ... it was difficult for me cause I'm not ... not, it's their culture so I thought:  
25 I'm the outsider  
26 between ... try something ...  
27 and I can tell you I'm great friend/ these guys trust me now ... much more than they used to.

The story is set in Khayelitsha in the Western Cape. *Khayelitsha* means “new home” in Xhosa, and this township is often described as the largest and fastest growing township in South Africa (Curry, 2011). More than 99% of the residents are Black Africans, and about 96% list isiXhosa as their L1 (The Population Register Update: Khayelitsha, 2005).

I found this small story difficult to ignore, and decided to use it (in spite of the analytical challenges such narrative accounts pose) as a starting point for the discussion of questions pertaining to membership and identity within a CofP. This small story is extracted from our interview and the extended positioning analysis method proposed by Barkhuizen (2009) (derived from Bamberg's SSA – see sections 2.5.1.3 and 4.4.3.2) guides the discussion below.

Level 1 of Barkhuizen's extended position analysis investigates the content of the story: Who are the characters? How do they relate to each other? What is the story about? What events occur in the story? Level 2 focuses on the interactional form of the story: How is the story structured? What is the role of the interviewer / interviewee in the construction of the story? How does the speaker position himself to the audience? What linguistic elements are used to accomplish the story? After having completed the analysis at Levels 1 and 2, Barkhuizen argues that the researcher will be in the position to make assumptions about the narrator's sense of self. This is accomplished at Level 3, by moving beyond the small story and considering data from the rest of the interview. This level aims to determine how the narrator expresses who he/she is and what their identity is in relation to greater discourses in the world (Barkhuizen, 2009:291). Thus, the analysis does not only divulge how the narrator positions

himself in greater discourses, but also how he is positioned by these greater discourses at play (2009:291-294). The analysis of this short story is discussed level by level.

### ***Level 1: The story***

The character list of this short story consists of Luke and a number of men in his team. He does not specify the exact number of men, but one can assume that they are not too many as they all fit into a vehicle that Luke is driving (lines 7-8). Luke does not tell us much about these men as individuals, but refers to them as “my team”, “Black men”, “the guys”, “they”, and “one of the guys”. Only in the beginning of the story does he group all of the characters together as members belonging to the same team (including himself) by saying “I’m the only guy in my team ...” (line 7). Right at the end of the story, the distance between the characters is smaller, but still not completely rectified (line 27). Throughout the rest of the story there is a clear division between Luke and the other men: Luke explicitly mentions “I’m the outsider” (line 25), that they see him as “not part of us” (line 10), and that these men do not “allow” others (in this case Luke) to be part of their group (line 12). This division among the characters is further communicated by the narrator by the constant use of grouping pronouns: *I/me* vs. *them/they/their*, and the constant positioning of himself opposite the rest of the men, e.g. “and I could see *they* were watching *me*” (line 21); “so I need to take *them* all the time” (line 8); “and I went with *them* one day” (line 14); and “it’s *their* culture” (line 24). He further emphasises the distance between himself and the rest of the group by singling himself out in terms of power – “and I’m the only guy... in my team, that has a licence.” – and position – “you’re the leader, not really part of us”. It is interesting that in this last instance he describes his outsider-status in what can be assumed is the team’s voice, summarising it as a direct quote from the other men, instead of speaking as himself in the first person, saying for instance: “I’m the leader, not part of them.” His method of communicating this idea positions the rest of the men as gatekeepers, actively deciding not to grant him membership to their group; therefore the decision is theirs, and Luke cannot be held accountable for not being a full member. He does however implicitly express a desire to be accepted as a part of the team, and it is this desire to belong that inspires him to join the men in eating.

In the story reference is also made to Black men in general (line 13). Luke says that he has known “for years already” that “they” do not allow just anybody into their group. As he has only been with the company for about a year, it is reasonable to assume that with this reference he is talking about more than just the men in his current work team – possibly

Black men in general or specific groups of Black men that he has encountered in the past. This story provides a glimpse of how he makes sense of these men and their group: they have their own culture that is not his culture; they do not allow anyone in; they do not view their leader as part of their group; and they “obviously ... braai on the street”. It is also implied that none of these men was going to do anything about the division in the team (especially not on that specific day), and that it was up to him, the outsider, to try something (lines 21-22).

As this story is indeed quite small and not rich in detail, the events illustrated here are not plentiful: at a physical level, the action that takes place is that the group of men were on their way back to the office, one of the men asked Luke to stop so they could buy something at the side of the road to eat, Luke pulled over, also got out of the car, the others watched him, and he started eating with them. Luke describes a second form of action at a deeper/ non-physical level: the men changed their attitudes and allowed him into their circle of trust (to a certain extent). As Luke is the main character, he is deeply involved in the action and the consequences of his action in the story. The only actions the other characters are directly responsible for, are asking to stop the car, buying food, and “watching” Luke. This story not only depicts the events of a certain day, or the events of that exact moment when the group ate together, but also provides insight into matters of the past and possibly the future. From the text above it is clear that Luke was not just an outsider on that specific day in Khayelitsha – he states that they have “always treated” him as not part of the team, that they treated him like an outsider “a lot of times” (line10).

The action described above draws attention to the conflict in the story. The conflict revolves around the inequality in power among the participants (Luke being the leader and not really one of the guys), as well as the conflict concerning membership to a specific group, i.e. Luke being an outsider because he is not part of their culture. He clearly positions himself as an outsider to their culture in lines 9-12 and again in lines 21-22. The conflict is described as nothing new – Luke is aware of this conflict, and has always been, and tries to salvage it by trying to get accepted into the group by eating with the men. (The matter of conflict will be further discussed in Level 3 of the analysis.) It is quite interesting that Luke does not mention the very realistic probability that these men speaking another language (isiXhosa) to each other contributes to his exclusion from the group. Possible reasons for him not mentioning language in the current story are that it is an issue that goes without saying within the South

African context, or that he feels he has already emphasised the language barrier earlier in the interview.

The conflict in the story and the relationship among the characters reveal something about the context of the story. Barkhuizen (2009:286) describes it as “how the characters are ordered in space and time inside the world of the story”. The only reason for all of the characters to be included in this story, is because they were working together, and at the time in which the story was set they were specifically working on a project in Khayelitsha. The only reason for Luke to be present at this time (as it seems from the way the story is told) is because he needs to take the men to their place of work. It is also quite possible that Luke’s presence is required at this time and place because he is the supervisor in charge of the project; however, he does not specify this in his account of that specific day. The characters normally work together on a day-to-day basis at the company’s head office, so they are not strangers to each other, and Luke has been the men’s supervisor for a year. One cannot then help but wonder why Luke felt the need to do something on this specific day. Could it have been that he felt even more like an outsider on this specific day, surrounded by mostly Black Africans, not in his comfort zone, not in his workplace where he has more control over interactions, but in Khayelitsha, among people who speak isiXhosa and braai at the side of the road? Why did he answer the question about culture influencing communication in the workplace with this specific story? Is he trying to emphasise the perceived severity of his non-member status?

To summarise this small story at Level 1 of the analysis, one could say that it is a tale about a manager who is painfully aware of his outsider-status within his workgroup and decides to take action in order to be accepted by his team.

### ***Level 2: The linguistic accomplishment of the story***

As mentioned above, Level 2 deals with “the interactional means employed for getting the story accomplished” (Bamberg and Georgakapoulou, 2008: 384). As Barkhuizen (2009:289) reminds us, the story is constructed by both the interviewer and the participant. Luke would not have told this story if I had not specifically probed him to discuss the influence of culture on interactions with his team members.

Luke signals the beginning of the story in line 3: “I don’t know if you’ve ever been to Khayelitsha?” This question would, of course, not have been asked for no reason at all, and

he explains his question by developing the story. In line 4 he seeks permission to break away from the rather rushed question-answer format of the interview<sup>29</sup> to tell the story: “and I don’t know if I’m going off the track.” With my response in line 5 (“No, it’s fine”) I invite him to continue his train of thought, he holds the floor for the rest of the story, and thus the story unfolds.

In lines 6-8 he explains why he was in Khayelitsha on that day, and at the same time introduces the other characters. He positions himself as the main character by mostly narrating the events of the day in the first person, except in line 10 when he voices the attitude of the other characters. In lines 9-13 he breaks away from the events of that specific day to insert information of his perception of the other men and their culture. In this section he provides a sense of context and history by saying that he has “known for years already”, and that it has “always been” that way. In line 14 he returns to the events of the day. The action of the story unfolds in lines 15-22, and thereafter he describes the change that has resulted from the action. He concludes the story with what can at first glance be perceived as a happy ending, but upon further investigation reveals that he stops himself from creating the illusion of absolute success, and rather compares how things used to be to how they are now, concluding that there has been an improvement. The events are therefore analysed by the narrator himself and an evaluation is provided to confirm that a certain measure of change has occurred: he has moved from being an absolute outsider to being someone who is now trusted more than before, although not yet perceived as a friend. The description of this change is rather brief and not clearly articulated, indicative of the narrator struggling to verbalise the exact repercussions of the action in the story, leaving the audience to believe that the outcome was positive, but having to fill in the gaps by themselves.

The speaker positions himself as the one who performs the action, the one who did not want to accept being an outsider, who did not want to be just the leader, but “one of the guys”. He can therefore be seen as the hero of the story, the underdog that broke free of his outsider-status, the one who was smart enough to know what to do to change his circumstances, and brave enough to try it. In spite of the cultural hurdles he encountered, he succeeded. The other characters in the story are not granted individual identities, but form a solitary entity

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<sup>29</sup> I believe this format is typical of interviews with professionals with demanding schedules in the workplace, something which was explained to me by the HR managers of the participating companies who granted me permission to conduct research within their organisations.

which refuses him membership to a team. It seems that these men are the gatekeepers and have the power to decide whom to allow into their group, but by Luke's heroic actions he lessens their power and gets a foot in the gate (Holmes, 2007:2000). Therefore he empowered himself by breaking through a cultural boundary without actually being invited by the core members.

The question which prompted the story (whether he finds that culture influences communication in the workplace), was answered by a brief "I think yes ..." and Luke then proceeds by telling the story, but he fails to explain the impact that culture has on a day-to-day basis within their normal place of work, and specifically on the discussions he has with his team regarding their performance. I wish to argue here, and continue this line of argumentation in the rest of the chapter, that Luke answered in the form of a small story because such stories provide a more indirect way of discussing transformation in the workplace. This argument will be further strengthened by following Barkhuizen (2009:284) who argues that once the analysis at Levels 1 and 2 is completed, the researcher is in the position to make further assumptions with regards to relating the small story to greater discourses revealed by data outside of the short story, and to gain a more in-depth understanding of the narrator's identity positions.

### ***Level 3: Connecting the small story to the rest of the data***

In the section above we explored the ways in which Luke positions himself and the other characters within the small story. But naturally he is not just a character in a story. He is positioned in the company hierarchy as a manager and therefore has to adopt that role and perform certain duties that are required by his position. Just like all the other participants from Company A, he is positioned by the company culture discourse, but demographically he is also positioned outside of the Black African culture that he talks about in the small story. As I have mentioned before, extended SSA is a suitable starting point for the investigation of how one positions oneself and others to be part of a CofP; therefore I now proceed to comment on these positions by referring to data outside of the small story.

I was unable to find any convincing evidence in the data of Luke positioning himself as a full member of a group, other than grouping himself as an Afrikaans speaker; not only does he portray himself to be an outsider in his team, the data from his interview also indicates that he has not achieved a level of full membership among the managers either. Of all the

participating managers from Company A, he has been with the company for the shortest time (only one year) and this qualifies him to be considered a newcomer to a certain extent. More evidence supporting this allegation is that Luke also does not use the “company vocabulary” employed by FG2 and the majority of the other managers of Company A, and he also does not display the same perceptions of what are considered to be standard practices, for example, associated with PAs (as exemplified in Chapter 5 with regards to contesting the dominant discourse within Company A). His identity as newcomer is further supported by the fact that he still has not built strong relationships with his team members and is still mostly treated as an outsider. Throughout the rest of the interview, as in the small story above, he makes constant references to the distance between himself and his team members (*I* and *me* vs. *them* and *they*). It is also worth remembering that he comes from a radically different background, representative of different styles of interaction (i.e. the military and being “used to giving orders”). His misperception of what his current job would entail (“I thought it would be a retirement job”) also illustrates that his assumptions made outside of the CofP were based on a lack of knowledge of the community, and the relations within the community, he was about to enter.

Luke’s small story of *not one of us* is not only interesting in isolation, but is also indicative of other insider/outsider discourses surfacing from the data. A number of other participants also expressed their “outsidership” or “otherness” during the interviews, or identified definite boundaries within teams, consequently dividing departments and companies to a certain extent, preventing certain individuals from full membership within specific communities. Anele offers additional support from Company A for the claim that culture creates a boundary (often based on a lack of knowledge of culture-specific conventions):

(41)

**Anele:** sometimes we’re walking in, and ... the guys would walk forward/ ahead of the ladies – which is culture. And then the other culture would think you’re disrespectful / you should allow women first. Those things are not/not there. So you’ve got a meeting and somebody’s already sulking because so and so didn’t treat me or greet me first – all those ... so culture plays a huge role in communication.

Anele’s example (in (41)) of a diverse group of individuals entering a room together demonstrates that an individual does not necessarily abandon his/her cultural beliefs and

practices, or become automatically tolerant of other cultures, in order to participate and follow a conceptual workplace culture. This contrasts with views expressed by the participants of FG2:

(42)

**Nora:** ... you are coming with different cultures, but we have one culture here, so ... irrespective of what your background at home is and that/I'm not saying leave your culture, I mean ... it will always be with you, but here it's a total different thing where we respect each other irrespectively.

Anele's example indicates that the workplace cannot be characterised by absolute shared practices and knowledge, as such actions still represent diverse practices and perceptions, indicating different CofPs, each including some individuals and simultaneously excluding others. In this telling one could thus identify culture as a *boundary object*. The concept of boundary objects will be clarified in section 6.2.1, accompanied by more examples of existing boundaries within all participating companies, and with specific reference to Luke's diverse team, divided by culture and language. This concept is, however, contested repeatedly by the participants of FG2, specifically arguing that "no one gets offended" by cultural difference (see (42) above, as well (53) below).

Another clear example of perceptions of "otherness" comes from an interview with a manager in Company B. In (43) below, Herman explains that when he is giving feedback to someone from the Bonteheuwel area, he has to use a different communicative strategy.

(43)

**Herman:** Some of our people is really ... they really take it to heart, sometimes you have to be straight with some of them because, um ... where people stay now ... in our suburbs ... there's a different way you can ... address it. Some take it, when you're talking too hard... you take it really ... they're very sensitive, and some will slow move really took it into that person. So the way to communicate to that person should just depend on the area that person comes from.

**T:** Could you give me an example maybe?

**Herman:** For instance a person who stays in the Bonteheuwel area, you know where Bonteheuwel is ... northern ... um, northern /southern suburbs ... they talk different how they

speak to people ... they've got a Fanagolo<sup>30</sup> type of thing how to speak. And to come to that point I will not use the words they said but it's more that, not a funny thing, but I will be more ... thorough *duidelik, duidelik om te sien dat jy weet dit was verkeerd wat jy gedoen het* – (“to clearly show that you know what you did was wrong”) *Hoekom het jy dit gedoen?* (“Why did you do it?”) But I will address it differently to the other person. Because they probably more soft-hearted type of people, cause that people is really hard, you say things - must be a *krasser* (“crasser”) way to say that.

Herman claims that there is a difference between the individuals from Bonteheuwel<sup>31</sup> and the other subordinates in his team. He describes “the others” as more sensitive, and as taking his feedback to heart, which, he feels, prompts him to be more gentle when addressing areas of performance and improvement with this group. However, with the Bonteheuwel group he feels that he has to not only be more explicit, but even harsh (*krasser* “crasser”), in order to convey the earnestness of his feedback. He compares the way they speak to a “Fanagolo type of thing”, possibly indicating that they use a specific variety of language (comprising influences from a number of languages, dialects, and slang) unique to the specific area that they reside in. The excerpt in (43) above also provides evidence that the interactions between him and the Bonteheuwel individuals contain foul or vulgar language (“I will not use the words they said” and “krasser”).

The examples from Companies A and B thus show that different CofPs exist within work teams and departments, that the multilingual/multicultural nature of the workplace is a definite cause of segregation and struggle, and that CofPs may require a specific set of linguistic conventions in order to achieve meaningful communication. The following sections will investigate how communication can be facilitated amongst these groups and how individuals may become members of a group in spite of differing linguistic repertoires.

## 6.2 Negotiating membership

Luke's attempt to discard his outsider status and be accepted within a group brings to mind the debate prevalent in the CofP literature regarding how an individual becomes or manages to become a member of a CofP, as discussed in Chapter 3. Wenger and Snyder (2000:142)

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<sup>30</sup> Fanagolo is a Zulu-based pidgin spoken in mining towns in South and Central Africa (Makoni and Mashiri, 2007:66).

<sup>31</sup> Bonteheuwel is an area of the Cape Flats, formerly known as a coloured township in the Western Cape.

state that membership is self-selected, implying that members know when to join a CofP, whether they can contribute anything to the group, and whether they can gain anything by joining. This notion is however contested by the idea that a CofP spontaneously comes into existence and that people are not necessarily consciously aware of being a member or strategically plan on becoming a member. In addition, Davies (2005:566) argues that being able to legitimately participate as a member within a CofP is not a choice, but a matter of sanction within a hierarchy; therefore the community decides whom to grant access into a group, denoting that a strong desire to gain membership is simply not enough. In his small story, Luke tries to take action to become a member, but his attempts can at most be described as bringing him a little closer. Therefore, he is incapable of enforcing this change of status on his own, and existing members need to grant him access into the group. Within the story it is clear that the group is not going to spontaneously grant him admittance – he cannot merely decide on becoming a member, and automatically have his desire realised. This realisation leads Luke to take action in order to gain the group’s approval.

### **6.2.1 Membership and language: Language as a boundary object**

In light of Luke’s story, and other similar tellings within the data, I would like to suggest that, specifically in a diverse workplace context where language is a major boundary object (Wenger, 2000), membership is not always a case of deciding to join or granting access: (at least partial) membership can also be mutually negotiated by both parties, i.e. the individual aligning him-/herself with the ways of the group, and the group managing the boundaries of the CofP. In order to clarify this statement, it is necessary to firstly put the notion of *language as boundary object* into perspective. This will be followed by examples of participants trying to align themselves to a community with particular focus on *the language issue*.

Wenger (2000:236) defines boundary objects as an artefact that supports connections between different practices. He suggests that discourses can be seen as a critical boundary object and that the existence of a common language “allows people to communicate and negotiate meanings across boundaries.” Other examples of artefacts serving as boundary objects may include tools, documents, medical records, blueprints, or processes such as explicit routines and procedures, allowing people to coordinate their behaviour across boundaries (Wenger, 2009:236). The concept of boundary objects was developed by Star (1989), and Star and Greisemer (1989), and first included in the CofP framework by Sandusky in 1997 (in Hildreth, Kimble and Wright, 2000:31). Hildreth et al. (2000:31) view

boundary objects as artefacts that cross the boundaries between CofPs while retaining their structure, and that are interpreted in a variety of ways by the communities across which they are distributed, thus demonstrating that even though knowledge may be embedded in artefacts, the process of transcending boundaries is not as simple as “capturing knowledge and passing it on.” Similarly, Carlile (2002:445) stresses that shared syntax is not enough to successfully distribute knowledge across boundaries, as knowledge is not only tacit, but cannot be separated from “doing” or “engagement” as it is localised, invested and embedded in practice. The majority of research to be found on boundary objects focuses on managing and moving knowledge across boundaries within organisations or institutions (see, for example, Hildreth et al., 2000; Carlile, 2002; and Kimble and Hildreth, 2005).

The concept of language or discourse being a primary boundary object enabling communication and negotiation is crucial within an organisation employing a diverse group of individuals and possibly encompassing a range of CofPs. This notion can be illustrated by considering a number of teams, departments and groups working together on a large project, thus demanding constant cooperation and negotiation, something which is highly probable within all three participating companies.

However, as mentioned on numerous occasions, assigning a common language (or official organisational language) in the context of the South African workplace may not be as simple as it seems. The Western Cape language policy states that English, Afrikaans, and isiXhosa should enjoy equal status within the Western Cape; however, organisations find it quite difficult to put this policy into practice. In an attempt to deal with their multilingual staff, companies select one official language (usually English) to be the official language of the company, and claim to make use of interpreters when necessary. I would like to suggest that if language is a *boundary object*, it can either facilitate or hinder participation and communication within and across CofPs, and I therefore assign the term a neutral connotation within this study (i.e. not automatically professed as a construct of support, as put forward by Wenger, 2000:236).

The following three excerpts ((44) to (46)) clearly illustrate the difficulties inherent in multilingual workplaces and their respective language policies:

(44)

**David:** (XXX)... Cause in the team there's ladies working there for 20, 30 years, and they're Afrikaans, Afrikaans, and Afrikaans. You walk into a meeting, and the Xhosa... and Zulu people want the meeting to be in English, but the Afrikaans people do not understand ... they can't follow the whole meeting. So ... you have to become a ... a ... *tolk* ("interpreter") ... and then people misunderstand. I say something in my head it's... but you understand it totally different in your head. And that creates ... issues ... it creates ... that people don't see each other on the same level.

In (44) above, David talks about his first management encounter with African members of staff after nearly 30 years in a traditionally Afrikaans company while helping out the Support Department for six weeks. He describes the situation as "totally different", emphasising the difficulties of conducting a group meeting in such a diverse team, and the difficulties associated with a new age of transformation. One cannot help but assume that transformational changes must be simultaneously uncomfortable for the old-timers and the newcomers: in this case the older Afrikaans-speaking ladies in the group who have become accustomed to certain linguistic behaviours, and the newcomers who are trying to gain entry into a CofP and who have become habituated in certain ways of doing and communicating. One must then also take into consideration that these old-timers are not simply displaying a stubborn unwillingness to make compromises (remembering that the speakers of African languages are agreeing to participate in English meetings) when retracting themselves into their own community, excluding others in the process. Being "Afrikaans, Afrikaans, and Afrikaans" implies that they are probably incapable of meaningful conversation in English and can therefore only build meaningful relationships with other Afrikaans-speaking individuals, in particular those in the same department experiencing the same discomfort and insecurity in a dissonant team. The disregard for their needs for uncompromised clarity of communication could even be interpreted as a disregard for their old-timer status within a community, thus moving them from the centre to the peripheries. This argument challenges the supposedly powerful roles of old-timers as portrayed in theory and in the literature (see section 3.2.1), and shows that organisational and governmental inputs may influence the degree of power held by previously considered full participating members of a CofP. I thus argue that gaining entry into and maintaining status within a CofP is much more complex than the theory admits.

Luke is currently the supervisor of the team that David describes in (44) above. In the excerpt in (45) below, he expresses the same difficulties with conducting group meetings as well as the general day-to-day management of such a diverse team.

(45)

**Luke:** That's the difficult part within my team, I've got uh uh uh a coloured team, so-called Coloured, and Black team. The Black will stick together and the Coloureds would stick together. Now to get them ... work together – it's it's it's it's still a struggle, uhm ... because nobody really trusts each other, because we guys speak Afrikaans, and they speak Xhosa. So it's always: they don't understand Afrikaans, and we don't understand Xhosa. So uhm, that is why, we just speak English when we're in a meeting, it's just English.

This selection explicitly illustrates that it is not only communication during meetings that sometimes goes awry due to the language issue but also everyday teamwork. This emphasises that language plays a significant role in how individuals group themselves together and form CofPs within the workplace, and even within the same department. Throughout the rest of the interview it becomes apparent that Luke is often forced to act as a mediator between the Black and the Coloured members of his team, transferring information between two CofPs, thus exercising what Wenger (1998:109) calls “brokering”. Brokering can be defined as providing a connection (e.g. by facilitating transactions and the flow of knowledge) between different CofPs (Pawlowski, Robey and Raven, 2000:331). Wenger (1998:109, 2009:235) explains that brokering may also include processes of translation, coordination, alignment between perspectives, and introducing elements from one practice to another. In order to act as a broker (also referred to as a “knowledge broker”), one should ideally have membership in multiple communities, and have “boundary objects that can accommodate similar interpretations across practices” (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002:154). Brokers should also be able to make new connections with other CofPs and open new possibilities for meaning (Wenger, 1998:109). This picture of an ideal broker as first portrayed by Wenger is however contested in the data, specifically in Luke's situation where he is clearly an outsider to one CofP within his divided team, but is still forced (by his position as the team leader and an expectancy of accountability for his team) to manage translation and coordination between the two groups. In 2009, Wenger adopts a more fitting picture of a broker: someone who does not “fully belong anywhere and may not contribute directly to any specific outcome, the

value they bring can easily be overlooked”, supporting the notion that Luke does not position himself as fully part of any particular team throughout the interview (2009:236).

In the excerpt in (46) below, Luke explains that it often takes him much longer to clarify certain information to the isiXhosa and isiZulu speakers in his team than to the Afrikaans and English speakers, and that, on occasion, he will employ the help of an interpreter to assist with translation. It is unclear whether such interpreters are members of the communities they are assisting.

(46)

**Luke:** Uh ... a lot of times ... it takes me so much longer ... to explain to a Xhosa person in in in in ah .... their second or third language, which is English, what I really expect from them .... (XXX) .... now let's try and work around it ... or get somebody else in .... uhm, because I've got somebody that's second in charge with me, and he is Xhosa speaking. So so that helps a lot, so what I'm doing at the moment, whenever I'm speaking to a Xhosa, I'll let him sit in, and and if that person doesn't understand – just explain it to them, and then we can go on with it.

Examples (44) to (46) above stress the communication barrier between the isiXhosa speakers and the Afrikaans speakers within this particular team. David's reference to the Afrikaans people as “Afrikaans, Afrikaans, Afrikaans” (example (44)) implies that their English is limited, but in example (46) above, Luke attributes communication difficulties to the isiXhosa speakers who are forced to communicate in their L2 (English). Luke never explicitly addresses the fact that the Afrikaans speakers' proficiency of the English language also contributes to hindered communication or discussions “taking much longer”. This is probably because communication with the isiXhosa speakers has to be in English, as Luke does not speak isiXhosa, but communication with the Afrikaans speakers can be (at least partially) in Afrikaans, because Luke speaks Afrikaans. Therefore, the L2 English of the isiXhosa speakers is not necessarily, in itself, more problematic (i.e. weaker) than the L2 English of the Afrikaans speakers, although this is what is implied in these examples, and elsewhere in the data. Instead, the problem is that Luke and the isiXhosa members of his team have no additional language to turn to when communication difficulties arise in English conversations, while the rest of the team has Afrikaans at their disposal to remedy difficulties that arise during English conversations with their leader. Luke thus constructs the isiXhosa-

speakers' poor L2 English as the language barrier, while, actually, the language barrier is the fact that Luke and the isiXhosa speakers have only one language at their disposal.

Switching to English in more formal group meetings seems to be considered the most practical, considerate solution by all three participating companies. It should however be mentioned that such a resort to English is not a general solution within the (diverse) workplace, as is made evident in the case of mainly Afrikaans-speaking old-timers in the examples above, who are now being excluded because they do not understand English. Similarly, the lack of (sufficiently high levels of) English language proficiency of isiXhosa speakers is offered as a reason why explanations take longer and communication difficulties occur.

Although Company C does not have any speakers of African languages, they still experience language as a boundary object between speakers of English and Afrikaans.

(47)

**Elsabe:** (XXX) ... because we had an incident just last week uh where I was sending out an email ... and all the Afrikaans people understood it, but the English one, the lady, she didn't, and after a week ... there was an issue and I addressed it, and I said okay but I did send out an email, and blah blah blah blah ... Oh, but my understanding was that ... So I realised that it's important where there is ah ... where ah ... it's process and stuff like that, I need to do it in English because ... uh ... ja. It's def ... there's definitely ... uh uh ... it's influencing the whole situation.

Elsabe is the only participant from this company who indicates that she grasps the severity of individuals being excluded by the predominant use of Afrikaans within the company, although her realisation may be more closely associated to the relation between language and performance, than to the relation between language and belonging/membership. Interestingly, interviews with the other individuals show that, in spite of this realisation, meetings are still mostly conducted in Afrikaans, regardless of the presence of English-speaking individuals.

Similar reports are given by participants from the other two companies: more than half of the participants claim to be Afrikaans-speaking and acknowledge that Afrikaans is most frequently used for communication within their departments (including sending group-

emails), in spite of the company policy, leaving speakers of other L1s regularly misinterpreting information, or unable to participate in the conversation.

From the examples and discussions above, it is evident that language is undoubtedly a determining factor in the shaping of a CofP, but this by no means entails that CofPs are monolingual and that they cannot encompass a diverse membership. The question then arises as to how membership is achieved or negotiated in spite of *the language issue*.

### ***Stages in the negotiation of boundary objects***

Sections 6.2.1.1 to 6.2.1.4 below will illustrate three different stages of gaining membership with regards to language as a boundary object. The first stage describes the inner conflict an individual experiences when he/she is on the peripheries due to a lack of competence in a particular language, and does not know exactly how to gain full membership. The second example is of individuals who are L1 speakers of a language other than that of the majority of community members, but who have figured out how to fully participate within the group in spite of their linguistic differences. Finally, an example will be given of individuals denying that *language* is an object in itself, or that it has any influence on group coherence or individual performance within a company, in spite of evidence contradicting their conviction. Interestingly, the examples will show that individuals are most often responsible for, and expected to take, certain actions (e.g. linguistic strategising) to become a member of a CofP, and that the majority does rather little in terms of lightening the burden and encouraging accelerated membership and participation.

#### **6.2.1.1 Still struggling: Negotiating one's way around the language obstacle**

The data show that for some individuals, gaining access to a group entails sacrifice and dedication, again contradicting the notion that, as a rule, membership is spontaneously achieved. Likewise, communities also have to make an effort to include outsiders by adapting their (linguistic) behaviour in certain instances. The excerpt in (48) below is from FG2.

(48)

**Carin:** It does ... become a barrier ... in a way ... because like, we, like when we have group meetings, and then they ask questions in Afrikaans ... then I can't say: no, can you translate that, cause we ...

**Joe:** ... sometimes forget

**Carin:** Ja, they forget as well ... so I don't wanna be like ... um ... I'm dragging them behind ... so, I'd like ... adapt ....

**Alice:** but you should ...

**Harry:** you should ...

**Nora:** It's a mental shift ... we've got a lady that started now, in our department as well, that doesn't understand Afrikaans, and ... many a times we need to remind ourselves, cause when we sit at the table, uh ... we speaking Afrikaans ... and many time we/we/we all need to remind ourselves: hello, um ... just stick to English, um ... eventually you'll pick up the lingo, and you'll pick up certain words ... you'll know already, but it shouldn't ...

**Carin:** Some people say ... I'm actually learning more Afrikaans now ... I'm learning more Afrikaans now. (*laughter*)

**Nora:** My personal thing ... and I agree with Harry ... in any situation ... people ... people need to step back and say: you know what, even if there's one individual who doesn't understand ... let's change the language barrier ... to English ... and everyone can understand.

**Carin:** ... it is true ... cause I miss some of the things ...

**Nora:** Of course you do ... of course you do

**Carin:** I'm scared to say no, um ... can you just ... repeat that in/in/in English.

Within FG2, Carin, an L1 speaker of isiXhosa, confesses to being too inhibited in larger group meetings to ask questions or to ask for translations and clarifications of information conveyed in Afrikaans. At first she states that her resolve is not to speak up and to rather remain in the dark because she does not want to prolong the meeting and possibly waste other members' time ("I'm dragging them behind"), but then she provides a more probable reason for her silence, stating that she is actually "scared" (last line, excerpt (48)) to ask for a translation. Experiencing such a strong emotion in a particular group setting indicates that she lacks the confidence to fully participate, probably because she does not see herself as a full member who has the right to influence the course of the interaction. She sees her potential requests as hindering and not contributing to the meeting. It is also probable that she does not want to draw attention to her inability to follow the meeting or conversation as this may marginalise her even further by emphasising her linguistic limitations, thus emphasising her "otherness" within the group. By contrast, she freely addresses the issue within FG2, assumedly due to the specific relationship she has with the individuals within the group. The other participants respond by apologising for being forgetful of the fact that she does not understand Afrikaans, confirming that it is obvious that she cannot (and should not) be expected to understand what is said in Afrikaans, and encouraging her to speak up and to

remind others of their thoughtlessness. Nora then supports the argument of this kind of exclusion being due to forgetfulness by telling of a similar issue within her immediate workgroup. She acknowledges that it is inconsiderate for the majority to communicate in a language that marginalises a newcomer to the group, until she “picks up the lingo”, i.e. becomes acquainted with the CofP’s linguistic repertoire. These reactions from Nora and the other participants are indicative of their insider status to the community in question. The suggestions they make also seem to reveal a certain level of leadership within the group.

The invitation extended to Carin to participate in future meetings shows that this CofP is not maliciously excluding speakers of minority languages, and that their spontaneous switch from one language to another can instead very often be attributed to what Goffman (1967, 1971) refers to as *interaction rituals* (see the section on *crossing* below). From the data it is evident that certain ways of interacting have become ritualised, and that interactants have certain communicative habits and are not always consciously aware of the impact of their linguistic actions on others. It is thus fair to assume that members of a CofP may have difficulty in adopting new practices. Consider Mary’s description, in (49) below, of a typical group meeting as yet another example of breaking communicative rituals.

(49)

**Mary:** ... when we ... start up a meeting, you start with ... sort of informal. You tend to go towards Afrikaans. Because the ... the lively person in our group is Afrikaans speaking ... But um ... we always try and ... get them to speak English, because not everyone in the room can/can understand Afrikaans. So, a little bit of flexibility with the culture in the company as well.

The excerpts in (48) and (49) above thus both clearly show that an individual is willing to make sacrifices to be accepted within a community, whilst the community (once made aware of these struggles) is simultaneously willing to transcend certain barriers to encourage participation from marginal members.

The contribution by Carin above (see (48)) follows lengthy descriptions by the other participants of FG2 of their inclusive company culture with numerous referrals to the company’s open door policy and clear communication channels, communicating an absolute belief that everyone is equal within the company and that everyone has access to the same

tools and information within the company. This belief may be either due to the participants' conviction of their successful work environment and their approval of "the way things are done", or the product of a constructed ideal company identity for the purpose of engaging in an interview with an outsider. This study is thus open to the possibility that within these co-constructed interviews, the presence of the researcher, as suggested by Cameron (2001), may have influenced how participants presented themselves as certain types of people, and created certain pictures of their company and organisational processes, in a manner that they deemed acceptable under the specific circumstances. I am by no means implying that the participants of FG2 fabricated the image of a perfect company to satisfy the researcher's quest for information whilst warding off further prying questions. It is entirely probable that this is truly their perception of the workplace and its culture. It is however indisputable that this perception is not widely representative of all the employees within Company A when comparing the discussion of FG2 with that of FG1, also taking into consideration the descriptions of the interaction (or lack thereof) between the lower level employees, as provided by Luke and David. What we thus find here is that the dominant discourse of inclusiveness is contradicted by discourses of alienation and exclusion. The different voices surfacing within Company A, as opposed to a singular discourse, are indicative of Bakhtin's (1981) theory of *multi-voicedness*. These voices are representative of different world views, addressing aspects of the struggles of gaining entry into a CofP.

### ***Aligning behaviour***

In (48) above, Carin jokingly states that she is "learning more Afrikaans now". This idea is repeated in a more serious tone by other participating individuals. Within the interviews a number of participants mentioned the fact that their Afrikaans has improved since working at the respective organisations. One could attribute this to natural acquisition due to exposure to a language, but it can also be seen as a deliberate attempt to align oneself with other members of a community. Consider the excerpt in (50) below from the interview with Melissa, an employee from Company B.

(50)

**Melissa:** And I've been told I sound very vulgar if I speak Afrikaans so I try avoid ... avoid it.

**T:** Why do people say that?

**Melissa:** My mom normally tells me I sound vulgar. (*laughs*) From Mitchell's Plain may I add, so ja...

**T:** But didn't she teach you Afrikaans?

**Melissa:** Normal ... just plain Afrikaans

**T:** So you don't ever speak Afrikaans at work?

**Melissa:** I do but I try to take it to another level. I work with Debbie so my – a lot of my Afrikaans I picked up from her. So I try very hard to keep up to that standard of Afrikaans instead of my ... *gewone platbek* (“ordinary/plain/common”) Afrikaans. (*laughter*)

**T:** So would you say that your Afrikaans is getting better now that you're working with her or?

**Melissa:** No I used to work with her. But now again I don't speak that much Afrikaans but ja. But when I do speak I try my best to keep it up there. (*laughter*)

**T:** But why wouldn't you just speak the way you speak at home?

**Melissa:** No because that just sounds wrong. That just sounds Coloured man. That just sounds Coloured no. No. (*laughter*)

Here Melissa reveals that she believes that the Afrikaans that she speaks is not acceptable within the workplace. She tries to avoid speaking Afrikaans as far as she can, but when she does speak Afrikaans, she tries to “keep it up to” a certain standard as modelled by one of her supervisors, Debbie. She regards Debbie's Afrikaans as appropriate linguistic behaviour, and aligns her behaviour in order to camouflage her background and possibly cultural influences. She associates the way she speaks Afrikaans with a typical Mitchell's Plain vernacular, which she describes a “*gewone platbek* Afrikaans”, i.e. just plain common Afrikaans. Melissa's action of taking her Afrikaans “to another level” indicates that she does not want to stand out from the members of her community. This telling thus introduces the reoccurring theme in the data of “correctness”, i.e. that some types/varieties of Afrikaans are more correct than others.

The claim that some individuals are (or are assumed to be) ashamed of their lack of linguistic uniformity, is echoed in FG1. In the excerpt in (51) below, Amy argues that individuals, specifically speakers of African languages in this case, who have not been educated in English and Afrikaans, are responsible to align themselves with the group and accordingly need to take certain measures (i.e. educate themselves further) to “fit into the environment”.

(51)

**Amy:** ... (XXX) and from there you can, you know ... educate yourself from there onwards. And then you fit into the environment ... using both languages, and your own cultural language. (XXX)

**Amy:** I would say ... I would think language plays a big role there. You know – if I speak to Bill in Afrikaans, and he doesn't (XXX) understand Afrikaans, *obviously* it's gonna make him feel ... not worthy. And I think that is important also ...

**Bill:** (*cough*) When it come to/to/to uh ... to/to the languages, sometimes it's a bit confusion ... I would say I/ I/ I speak normally English, so ... English is not first language, so I have to *try* ... and turn to/ to their language, to her or his language, so ... I have to try to understand. She must understand me, and then I can understand her. So I would sit there and ask which one ... (unclear) ... is good for us, and then we can communicate.

In (51) above, Amy singles out Bill, an L1 speaker of isiXhosa, in order to demonstrate her conviction, as an insider to a group based on her linguistic capabilities, of people (outsiders) feeling “unworthy” when spoken to in a language that they do not understand. Bill tries to lessen the severity of the emotional impact that his linguistic limitations have by using hedging devices, specifically, stating that these limitations cause “a bit of confusion” as opposed to the intense emotional reaction predicted and assumed by Amy. Bill also indicates that he tries to linguistically align himself with his managers (“turn to their language”), thus making a compromise. He does however declare that the other actor should also make an attempt to negotiate meaning, and to contribute to finding a way for them to communicate, thus contradicting Amy's point of view that the responsibility lies only with him, and with speakers of African languages in general, to ensure that they are included in conversations and the sharing of information. This excerpt thus illustrates that assumptions are made based on a speaker's L1 status, that there are competing assumptions regarding who has to do what to ensure mutual communication and participation, and that open communication and participation in a diverse workplace can only occur through (linguistic) negotiation among individuals. Interestingly, no one in this discussion makes the point that L1 speakers of Afrikaans and English should perhaps attempt to learn isiXhosa or isiZulu. Luke is the only participant in the entire study who suggests that he should perhaps make an effort to acquire another language in order to communicate with his team more efficiently.

### ***Identities under construction***

The process of aligning oneself to become part of a group supports the theory that identities are constantly under construction. The excerpt in (52) below illustrates that adapting one's linguistic behaviour is not the only way to align oneself to a group, and that other behavioural changes may be required to “fit in”.

(52)

**Jenny:** In my culture, eye contact is not allowed, actually ... actually because ... it's like disrespect ... I can't look my father the face ... in his eyes ... it's like I'm cheeky. I have to turn down and ...

**T:** Do you experience something like that at work ... ?

**Jenny:** No ... I love it! (*laughter*) I'm strong. At the beginning it was a little strange, I wasn't comfortable with it, because ... even now with management, I still have it in me ... bit shyness, I won't look them in the eye ... looking down. But with my friends now, even with me friends before it was ... I wouldn't say what I want to say ... but now: I'm bold, I look them in the eye. Tell them what I want to say.

Jenny is an L1 speaker of isiZulu who participated in FG1. Within this telling she traces a progression in the sense of personal empowerment that she experienced from being a newcomer to the company up to the present day. Interestingly, she mentions that the practices she has acquired to enhance her membership within a CofP is being extended to other networks outside of the workplace (“but with my friends now, even with me friends”). Throughout the focus group discussion it is evident that Jenny does not feel inhibited in the particular setting – she is the first to make a joke, her participation is constant, she is comfortable sharing personal experiences (as illustrated by the excerpt above), and she does not hesitate to excuse herself at the end of the meeting, after whispering something to the participant sitting next to her, followed by indirectly acting as the spokesperson for the group, signalling to the moderator that it is time for all the ladies to attend to the tea duties. She does however mention that she has not achieved this level of confidence with members of management yet, and that this newfound boldness is reserved for her peers. She attributes this change in personality to moving to the Western Cape and joining Company A. This telling is a perfect example of evaluating how one's own identity or personality differs from that of a group, and then taking action to align oneself in order to blend in and benefit from being a member of a CofP. By telling this story, it is clear that Jenny is not only satisfied, but excited about the world of possibilities which has been opened by slightly altering her behaviour, i.e. making eye contact with others and letting her voice be heard, despite the fact that she perceived these actions as “strange” and uncomfortable in the beginning. This telling is an illustration of moving away from one identity (her ethnic identity) and assuming characteristics of another within a specific context – she has come a long way from being a

demure girl, avoiding eye contact and keeping her opinions to herself when she started at the company, to one who now perceives herself as an equal among her peers and even acts as a leader in the group, e.g. by taking the lead in signalling that the meeting should come to an end.

The actions several participating employees take to facilitate belonging, e.g. Melissa's adaptation of her colloquial Afrikaans to pure or "correct" Afrikaans (also mentioned by Nora and Harry – see (53) below), as well as Jenny's behavioural changes (i.e. making eye contact), can be explained by Rampton's (1995, 2009) theory of *crossing*. The term *crossing* refers to appropriation of behaviours associated with groups someone does not belong to. Rampton (2009:149) explains the concept of crossing as involving "a strong sense of ethnic boundary transgression, the variants being used more likely to be seen as anomalously 'other' for the speaker", something that could possibly lead to questions of legitimacy and entitlement. Cameron (2001:175) emphasises that crossing is not necessarily employed to "pass" as being something or someone, but rather to index certain characteristics associated with a specific group. Such more subtle practices of crossing are evident in the excerpts from the data provided above. Rampton (2009:150) argues that everyday crossing is often associated with ritualised interaction (a notion put forth by Goffman in 1971). "Impersonal verbal rituals" are characteristic of everyday (workplace) interactions, and formulas are often used to accomplish these actions, e.g. greetings, apologies, thanking, requesting, and expletives (Rampton, 2009:160). Goffman contends that these rituals frequently occur in interactional uncertainty, and that these "moments of jeopardy intensify the need for participants to display regard for the relations on hand and social order more generally" (in Rampton, 2009:160). These situational demands are thus frequently met by evasive or redressive verbal responses (i.e. formulas), which serve to sustain and restore normal relations and avoid FTAs (Rampton, 2009:160). Consequently, crossing is used to maintain relations within specific situations – outsiders and newcomers adopt the group's desired/normal/usual (linguistic) behaviour to index membership, to be allowed to participate within the group, and to let interactions run smoothly, without drawing attention to their "otherness".

Examples of seminal studies on crossing include Butler's (1999) research of a White adolescent boy using hip-hop slang associated with African American communities; and Hall's (1995) investigation of telephone sex workers which revealed more extreme instances

of crossing; for example, a man successfully passing as a female, by appropriating his speaking in similar ways as his female colleagues, and workers often having to adopt repertoires of ethnically distinct characters on request of their customers (in Cameron, 2001:175). The latter study clearly illustrates that identities enacted at work are not necessarily the same identities individuals adopt outside of the workplace, which confirms the use of crossing to achieve certain goals within the workplace.

### 6.2.1.2 Boundaries transcended and full membership achieved

Consider the excerpt in (53) below, from the FG2 discussion.

(53)

**Nora:** I think it does / it does become a problem. I ... when I started here ... I mean, Shesus, I was completely English, and, I mean, I didn't ... I mean I did Afrikaans at school ... but, um ... I come from Southern Suburbs, so we have a ... a ... helluva slang. (*laughter*) So, ja, Harry will know. We/we ... we don't even speak ... there's not even a Afrikaans language that we speak, so, we created our own little ... (*laughing*)

**Harry:** ... our own little language. (*laughing*)

**Nora:** Our own little language that makes us feel comfortable, and that didn't work here. So when I came here it was *suiwer* ("pure") Afrikaans, and it was like, you know ... this is what you're doing. And I dealt with people in the field, cause I work in the training department, and that was a bad thing for me, because I couldn't/ I couldn't speak to them, but I did exactly what Harry did. I told them: you know what ... I battle with Afrikaans. English is mother language. Um .... I'm gonna try to explain to you as much as I can ... the two of us then need to come to some consensus – do you understand me/ don't / if not – I will then go to somebody that can maybe translate and you can understand me. So I think it's just that...um...it's not a problem, but it ... if you don't have the/ the/the/the tools to be able to, you know, express yourself um ... clearly enough ... it will become ... it will become a barrier. Because people won't understand what you're saying.

(XXX)

I think here, um ... it's easier because I will speak Afrikaans to people ... if they call me, and they speak Afrikaans – I'll try. And when I feel ... Sheesh, it's becoming too much now, I'll stop ... and I'll say: you know what, it's just so you remember, I don't understand, so I'm gonna speak English, and most of the time ... nobody gets offended. Nobody will say: oh no, I can't understand you. So ... ja ... I think that if you take the ... the first step and you say, you know, what I .... I know I'm not good at this, but it doesn't mean that I'm a failure, you know ... I just/ I just need you to understand what I'm trying to say, so ja ...

The theme of “purity” and “correctness” pertaining to Afrikaans was discussed above (see section 6.2.1.1), but what distinguishes the excerpt in (53) above from the other examples of adapting one’s linguistic practices, is that here Nora talks about having accomplished the transcendence of the linguistic boundary and having achieved full membership. In this selection, Nora tells how she has managed to find a way to fully participate within a CofP in spite of the fact that she could not speak “pure” Afrikaans<sup>32</sup> when she started at the company. (She also mentions that the company used to be predominantly Afrikaans in the past.) She draws Harry (who grew up in the same neighbourhood as she did) into the conversation to back up her allegations that the Afrikaans they learned to speak would not suffice in their current place of work. The descriptions of this variety of Afrikaans range from a “helluva slang” to their “own little language”. She goes on to explain how she reached a point after a period of struggling, where she felt comfortable enough to explain to her co-workers that she did not understand Afrikaans well and requested to reach some kind of consensus as to when she absolutely needed to communicate in English, taking into consideration that this compromise could involve an interpreter in certain instances. She would still try to engage in Afrikaans during casual chats with her co-workers, but as soon as she feels that her understanding or performance may be compromised, she reverts to English. The ease with which she expresses her desire for switching languages illustrates that she is not a newcomer and not shy to communicate her needs, thus indicating her status as an accepted member in the group. This notion is supported by the statement that “nobody gets offended”. Her story is free from any strong emotions and is, instead, representative of logical arguments which are understood and supported by a group. This telling is once again indicative of the belief in the existence of a company culture that allows for this kind of negotiation request.

### 6.2.1.3 Denial

Many participants stated that they did not think that language differences between the staff had a particularly strong influence on communication within their respective workplaces or specific departments. Some admitted that language could possibly, theoretically, influence communication, but did not indicate that they felt strongly about the matter or even perceived it in their current situation. This notion of language as a *non-issue* was mainly popular amongst the participants from Company C. It is probable that seeing as this company only

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<sup>32</sup> “Pure” Afrikaans (*suiwer* Afrikaans) refers to a variety of Afrikaans characterised by the limited use (or exclusion) of slang or English words.

has L1 English and L1 Afrikaans speakers, they are not confronted with such major communication hurdles as the two larger, more diverse, companies. This is illustrated by the excerpt in (54) below, from the interview with Marike (an employee at Company C).

(54)

**Marike:** No ... well, most people in this company specific, they are bilingual, so ... they mostly understand what you are saying – if they do have a problem, then you’ll just ... obviously express it in their language, but ... in general meetings we would ... for instance if there is an English person in the room, they would do an English meeting. Uhm ... just because they are / Afrikaans people are better understanding of English than English people are of Afrikaans because we just get in contact with it more. Not because the English person is ... stupid or something ... where do they see, where do they get in contact with Afrikaans? So ... in that sense they will then ... tend to go more the English route. Someone who doesn’t understand – you’re free to ask a question ...

Marike expresses a very common belief amongst the participants within this study – that, as a rule, group meetings are generally conducted in English, even if the majority of the group is Afrikaans-speaking. This policy is however contested in many tellings from members of all three participating companies, again revealing multi-voicedness in the discourses pertaining to workplace practices (see also Wayne’s small story below). Whilst informing me about the company’s language policy, Marike also reveals some perceptions regarding membership within the company: In the telling, Marike positions herself as an outsider, distancing herself from her fellow employees by referring to them as “people in this company” and “them”. The only time she includes herself is when she uses the collective pronoun “we” to talk about the L1 Afrikaans speakers. This coincides with the idea that teamwork, cooperation and membership is not an absolute priority for individuals who are in constant competition in a commission-driven environment, as discussed in Chapter 5. Consequently, expressions of membership or belonging are quite rare within the data from Company C. The only groups or communities Marike does distinguish are language based. It is clear that she perceives L1 speakers of Afrikaans to have a better command of their L2 English than English speakers have of their L2 Afrikaans. She focuses on not coming across as biased or bigoted, by offering the explanation that Afrikaans speakers are more frequently in contact with English than vice versa, therefore not implying that an English person is “stupid or something”. This view is not uniquely Marike’s as it is a common generalisation in South Africa that

Afrikaans-speaking people need English much more than English-speaking people need Afrikaans, and that Afrikaans-speaking people do in fact have much more exposure to English (in the media, etc.) than English-speaking people have to Afrikaans. Therefore it is safe to assume that it is easier for Afrikaans-speaking people to acquire an adequate/high level of receptive skills in English, than for English-speaking people to do the same for Afrikaans. Her view is also representative of many other participants' that the responsibility of clear communication is dependent on the majority, i.e. knowing that they have to accommodate speakers of other L1s – recall Nora's view (excerpt (48)) that people should communicate in the language that everyone can understand, even if it is only for the sake of one or two individuals.

Mary (a participant in FG1) echoes the strategy of using English when conducting a meeting with a mixed group – see excerpt (55) below.

(55)

**Mary:** And a company culture ... um ... most people here ... Most people here speak Afrikaans. In my team ... that I work with, we have a mixture Afrikaans, English and Xhosa speaking, but when we, when we ... start up a meeting, you start with ... sort of informal. You tend to go towards Afrikaans. Because the ... the lively person in our group is Afrikaans speaking. But um ... we always try and ... get them to speak English, because not everyone in the room can/can understand Afrikaans. So, a little bit of flexibility with the culture in the company as well.

Again, the idea is reinforced (as in many other instances within the data) that English is the preferred language for group meetings and discussions. This excerpt shows that differences in L1 are not perceived by all to hinder membership and participation within a CofP, but that there is a solution to overcome such a barrier. However, Mary's hedging (“*a little bit of flexibility*”) reveals that this strategy is employed rather arbitrarily, and that Afrikaans is still more frequently chosen for casual conversations, undeniably still resulting in the exclusion of some individuals.

The small story discussed in the next section is a typical example of companies not following their self-proclaimed language policy, and the consequences thereof.

#### 6.2.1.4 Wayne's small story of *not taking it up*

##### *Background*

Wayne is one of a few L1 English speakers employed at Company C and also the only English-speaking participating employee from this company. At the time of the interview, Wayne was the most recently appointed member of staff at Company C. He joined the company about nine months prior to the interview and works as a marketing consultant. He is 26 years old, and was raised by Afrikaans parents. He attended English schools but has been exposed to Afrikaans throughout his life. He states that his manager mainly communicates with him in Afrikaans and that he is comfortable with this arrangement.

The small story below was told after discussing factors that could possibly lead to negative performance discussions. He could not really think of any as he claims to be happy with the way his manager talks to him and addresses issues of performance. He stated that as long as he knows what is expected of him, he is happy. I then asked if he thought that language could possibly influence the effectiveness of the meeting, based on the fact that these discussions take place in his L2, to which he answered that it can “sometimes” play a role, especially in group meetings where the Afrikaans words “are too big” for him to understand (with which he, of course, means that the more formal terms are not part of his L2 Afrikaans vocabulary). Thereafter, I asked if he thought that misunderstandings sometimes occur based on the language issue, and the story started unfolding.

##### *Wayne's Small Story*

- 1      **Wayne:** Ja, I do think so, the reason why I think so ... is ...
- 2      if ... you're not ... you know now where you said vague ... you know ...
- 3      if it's not like put out what is expected by the manager, and by yourself,
- 4      then it can lead to miscommunication ... you understand?
- 5      Especially like pending report ... for myself for example I was under the impression
- 6      that it needs to be ...
- 7      on your 5<sup>th</sup> day turning to 6, but it actually is on your 4<sup>th</sup> day turning to 5.
- 8      But because I didn't take it up and ask like okay what is it supposed to be then my pending
- 9      report was behind.
- 10     **T:** Okay, so you didn't ask. No one explained it?
- 11     **Wayne:** Ja, because I was under the impression ...
- 12     it was just explained to us look we must phone them on 5 days, when it's ...

- 13 when it turned day 5,  
14 I was under the impression okay when it turned day 5 okay,  
15 that's the last day that they need to be – so everything on day 6 needs to be phoned.  
16 So it's always on day 5 ... but it was actually miscommunicated ...  
17 so it was also because I didn't ask the question man ... you see ..?  
18 **T:** Was it explained to you in English or Afrikaans?  
19 **Wayne:** In Afrikaans!  
20 **T:** So you didn't check to see that you got it right ...?  
21 **Wayne:** ... ja that I got it right so you see ... what I took ...  
22 what I understood wasn't exactly what was supposed to be done?  
23 Then I did some follow up now and I found this is actually what needs to be done ...  
24 so now I gotta work my arse off the next two days, so ...  
(XXX)  
25 **T:** Okay ... so after that, do you now ... double check ... ask ... before you leave a meeting?  
26 **Wayne:** Ja, now sometimes look honestly hey ... sometimes I don't ...  
27 now I 'm done with a meeting and then it's like ... a ... a ... negative performance thing ...  
28 then I just wanna get out of there. As quick as possible man and get back to work.  
29 **T:** Okay ...  
30 **Wayne:** Then I don't really listen, hey I just there ... I'm hearing what they're saying,  
31 but I'm not really listening and taking it in ...  
32 **T:** So that's maybe another factor – everyone's so rushed here ...  
33 **Wayne:** Ja ... you can see how it goes here ... it's like mad ....

By analysing this small story it once again becomes clear that small stories do not just provide answers to questions asked by the researcher, but that a substantial amount of identity work is revealed.

### *Level 1*

In the beginning of this excerpt Wayne refers to communication between an employee and a manager, but in the small story itself, he is the only character. There are vague implications of management (e.g. “take it up” and “ask the question” implies that there is someone to take it up with or someone to ask; and “it was just explained” implies that someone was in charge of explaining). However, no other characters are personified in the telling. He does make reference to “us” and “they're” in lines 12 and 30, not in order to indicate membership or to emphasise the existence of distinctive groups, but more likely as contextual markers, i.e. to indicate that the instructions that were communicated were explained to a group, and not just

to Wayne individually. Thus the miscommunication illustrated in the telling stemmed from a group meeting.

The story can be summarised as being about a miscommunication regarding a continual task that has to be performed regularly at a certain time (i.e. calling potential clients on the pending report list by the fifth day after first contact with the person in order to determine if he/she is interested in becoming a client). The miscommunication (in light of the preceding discussion) seemingly occurred due to the fact that the meeting was conducted in Afrikaans, which is Wayne's L2. However, he does not assign blame to anyone for communicating instructions in Afrikaans; rather he claims to have assumed that he understood the process ("I was under the impression" in lines 5, 11 and 14) and says that he did not double check to see whether he had in fact understood it correctly. Thus, surprisingly, as an English speaker in a dominantly Afrikaans group, he does not feel strongly about language as a boundary object. As the only character in the small story, he is positioned at the forefront of the action and takes full responsibility for the misunderstanding which, according to him, occurred because he had not checked whether he had interpreted the instructions correctly (lines 8 and 17) and he had not made sure what was supposed to be done (line 23). He also does not assign blame for the consequences of the misunderstanding, namely having to work his "arse off" (line 24). He then confesses to not being more careful about making the same mistake in the future (lines 26-28) and still leaving a meeting as soon as possible without double checking that he has understood correctly.

### ***Level 2***

Line 1 is the only instance of Wayne agreeing that language could be a possible cause of miscommunication during meetings, but he then starts telling a story that focuses more on him not confirming the details of the task. The story is introduced in line 5 with the words "especially like the pending report", which is followed by his explanation that he is using this task as an example of an instance of miscommunication in the past. This illustration of an actual miscommunication that occurred is structured as a small story within an interview. What he understood to be done is described in line 7, and he then expands this thought in lines 12-16. Before line 16, he reiterates the fact that he misunderstood what should be done several times – see lines 5, 7, 11, and 14. The consequences of this misinterpretation was that his "pending report was behind" (line 9), i.e. that he was behind schedule. He includes an explanation of what was actually meant by describing the correct way of going about the task

in line 7. He does not reveal how he became aware of the fact that he had misinterpreted the instructions in the first place – it is probable that his manager addressed the issue as she noticed that he was falling behind; however, this possibility is contested by his stating “I did some follow up and I found ...”, which indicates that *he* was responsible for detecting the mistake (though exactly how he did this remains unclear). He then confirms that he had misunderstood the task all along and clarifies the confusion (line 23), followed by correcting the mistake. Line 24 indicates that he has only recently become aware of the correct method for completing the task and he concludes that he is currently (at the time of the interview) busy solving the problem, i.e. trying to make up for lost time (“so now I gotta work my arse off the next two days”). I have omitted text between lines 24 and 25 as I took a moment to apologise for taking up more of his time while he was already under a great amount of pressure to get back on track. In line 25, I steer the conversation back to the content of the small story in an attempt to determine whether he has since adapted his communication strategies after the miscommunication incident, and, surprisingly, he begins by saying “yes”, but stops himself and confesses to just wanting to get out of a performance discussion as quickly as possible, especially in the case of negative feedback (lines 26-28). In line 28, he adds that he does not just want to get out of the meeting, but also wants to get back to work. In line 27 he says that when he is “done with a meeting” he wants to leave the meeting immediately, and in lines 30-31 he mentions that other people are still continuing the meeting but that at that stage he is no longer actively listening to them – this raises the issue of when *he* is done with the meeting as opposed to when the *meeting* is actually done. In this case, the meeting can, in fact, not be over as others are still talking. I shall return to this point shortly.

In line 31 I mention the fact that “everyone’s so rushed here”, not actually as a suggestion of a factor contributing to miscommunication (as it may seem in the transcription), but as a concluding thought with reference to numerous mentions of being rushed and time management issues in the rest of the interview. In line 33 he says “you can see how it goes here,” as he gestures to the office through the glass door behind us, showing me how busy the all of the employees are, describing the activity behind us as “like mad”.

### ***Level 3***

In this story, Wayne actively positions himself as the doer; he is not a bystander or a witness, but the main character who takes responsibility for all of the actions in the story: leaving a meeting under a false impression, recognising that he misinterpreted the assignment,

following up and finding out what is actually expected, and working hard towards solving the problem. He does not blame the manager for not explaining the task properly or for explaining it in Afrikaans. He does not position himself as a victim, but rather as the person in the wrong who left the meeting without double checking the facts. He admits to his own mistakes and habits of not participating in the meeting, not really listening, and wanting to leave as soon as the meeting is done. He also positions himself as an individual figuring things out for himself, working on solutions alone, not as a mentee being guided by a mentor, and not as a member of a team looking to the group for help. From this story is evident that Wayne does not experience being marginalised in spite of the fact that meetings are conducted in a language that the rest of the group can fully understand, only excluding *him* from fully participating. He also reveals no desire to participate and thus chooses to remain a non-member. His actions could possibly be due to the fact that he is still a newcomer and is currently preoccupied with achieving targets and making money. He also mentions that he only intends on staying with the company for a couple of years, thus not necessarily seeking to build strong personal relationships.

Alternatively, when considering this small story in isolation, one could argue that his lack of interest in participation may be indicative that no perceived sense of community exists and therefore there is nothing to belong to or not belong to. The latter argument is, however, contested when taking the rest of his interview data into account: in his response to the role-pay scenario he talks about walking around the office and making a point of being friendly, greeting his co-workers in the morning and providing them with “a bit of encouragement for the day”. Such actions are indicative of social interactions among members of communities, engaged in the same practices, and working toward common goals. What we thus find in the data is that small stories are used to introduce discursive struggles, specifically on the influence of language on organisational practices and perceptions of workplace communities. What sets Company C apart from the other two companies, is that even though the employees are ultimately working towards a common goal (reaching a collective target in terms of the number of new clients recruited each month), they are still competing against each other due to a strong emphasis on commission and individual rewards for the best performing consultant.

The complex relationship among employees within this organisation calls the application of Wenger’s community based framework into question. Wenger repeatedly argues (1998,

2000) that CofPs exist in every organisation and that we all are part of CofPs at home, at work, at school, and/or in our hobbies. Accepting this premise as a departure point for the present study, I will not contest the existence of CofPs within Company C, in spite of the clear difference between the accounts of (lacking) group membership and limited participation given by employees of this company, and the expressions of desired and valued membership given by employees of Companies A and B. Instead, I argue that there is a need to identify different *types* of CofPs according to how wide or narrow the functions of the CofP is. Some CofPs may have the sole, formal purpose of working towards a common goal, while others have this formal purpose but, in addition, have less formal functions as well, such as creating an atmosphere in which there is a feeling of belonging, communication is open and informal, and good relationships are important (and valued) by members. The notion of employees sharing a *passion* for joint enterprises (Wenger and Snyder, 2000:139; Wenger, n.d.) may also have to be reconsidered as it seems that this passion (in terms of engaging in a mutual activity) is lacking in Company C and replaced by a sense of satisfaction of chasing and reaching individual targets.

### **6.3 Summary**

This chapter specifically discussed the role language plays in different perceptions of communities, as well as the acquisition of membership to these CofPs. Specific attention was given to language negotiations and the adaptation of linguistic strategies at varying degrees of membership. Three different stages of becoming a full member were discussed, i.e. moving from being in denial of community barriers (6.2.1.3) to making efforts to transcend barriers by negotiating membership and aligning oneself to a group's behaviours by means of crossing (6.2.1.1), to being accepted as a full member of a group in spite of certain differences, and enjoying the privilege of full participation (6.2.1.2). SSA served as the main analytical tool for analysis. It was found that small stories in the data are characteristic of identity work and offer platforms for introducing alternative discourses. Small stories are thus not to be discounted in organisational discourse, as often this seems to be the point where participants feel comfortable to introduce questions of identity which do not necessarily fit the dominant organisational discourses. In addition, small stories are important in analysing the construction of identity, as discourses which contradict earlier discourses of self and others are also continually introduced through the telling of these stories. Small stories seem to be the vehicle which allows the existence of the multi-voicedness inherent in any

discourse. The chapter further reveals the limitations of the current use of the notion of CofP, and the lack of attention in particular to power and hierarchy, which (unsurprisingly) seems to be important in the organisation of CofPs. The data also reveal that notions such as old-timers and newcomers need to be problematised as in a transforming, multilingual workplace these notions are not as straightforward and simple as in a set (i.e. non-transforming), less diverse workplace.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The primary aim of this study was to investigate how PAIs are performed by different business organisations in the Western Cape, and how participants of PAIs experience these interactions. The nature of the qualitative data collected for this study (consisting of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions) called for this study to be set in the broader framework of DA. Considering the absence of an existing analytical model to guide a study of this nature, I selected genre analysis and SSA as analytical tools. Genre analysis specifically enabled me to identify how PAIs are constructed in terms of form, content, structure and social practice, consequently highlighting the similarities and differences within and between companies, and leading to the construction of dominant and competing discourses. SSA allowed me to investigate the expressions of individual identity, group identity and membership, thus emphasising the significance of CofP theory to the present study. Studies focusing on CofPs have often been critiqued on the basis that overwhelming emphasis is placed on the discussion of community, and that the investigation of shared practice is frequently neglected. In my opinion, the structure of this dissertation addressed this problem by dedicating Chapter 5 to the issues related to actual practices within the workplace (the performance of PAIs) and Chapter 6 to the discussion of membership to communities within the workplace. The analysis of the data produced a number of practical and theoretical considerations, discussed in this chapter.

#### **7.1 Conclusions and theoretical considerations of the present study**

##### **7.1.1 PAIs as genre from a DA perspective**

Genre analysis was specifically used to answer research questions 1 and 2 of this dissertation. Research question 1 concerned the different ways in which PAIs are constructed in business organisations in the Western Cape, and research question 2 sought to identify the dominant and competing discourses related to PAIs. The findings of this study revealed that several generic PAI features in terms of structure and function exist among the three organisations. The most prominent similarity is that all three companies claim to conduct at least one annual formal PAI which typically includes a dual rating process. Participants also revealed that they generally attribute the success of PAIs to the managers' ability to conduct such a meeting or to specific managerial styles of conducting such a meeting. The reported frequency of PAIs

differs from company to company, and from department to department. All participants are, however, in agreement that ad hoc performance discussions occur regularly or as required. Other common generic features broadly include discussing the ratings, commenting on an employee's positive performances and contributions, addressing areas of concern (i.e. performance areas in need of improvement), making an employee aware of the consequences of his/her actions, ensuring that company policy is adhered to, discussing salary increases, offering guidance or assistance to the employee, discussing the employee's need for further training, and setting future performance goals. Consequently, PAIs are considered to be functional largely in terms of performance evaluation, employee development and performance enhancement.

The investigation of PAIs as genre has further revealed dominant and competing discourses relevant to the construction of PAIs. Firstly, it became apparent that there is a conflict between the notion of "a set company procedure" for conducting PAIs, and managers "doing things their own way". Secondly, the idea that PAIs are tailored individually according to the employee's personality and individual needs is opposed by evidence that managers resort to the use of communication rituals or structural templates governing the performance of PAIs. The data showed that conflict also exists in structural preferences between managers and employees: some employees are displeased with the way in which managers approach PAIs, as they prefer the PAI to be structured in a straightforward fashion, e.g. excluding small talk and "bad news first", whereas managers report on typically starting with small talk, then moving on to a discussion of the positives, followed by drawing attention to the negatives, and concluding on a positive note. Another conflict illustrated by the data is that although PAIs are generally regarded as "helpful", many participants attributed little value to actual PAI discussion. Possible explanations for the disregard of these meetings included that due to open communication lines, performance is continually discussed, making formal PAIs redundant, or that employees deemed them meaningless as they have little scope to grow or have no realistic expectations of development based on the limitations of their positions. PAIs were also depicted by some as a social and inclusive process, comparing it to "just a normal chat" while others' accounts of PAIs did not support this notion, and rather depicted PAIs as a mechanical process, or an extremely sensitive endeavour.

In anticipation of the possible critique that this dissertation merely assumed that PAIs are genres, instead of investigating whether PAIs can be classified as professional workplace

genres, I would like to argue that the data make it explicit that PAIs can undoubtedly be classified as professional genre as these communicative events are broadly conventionalised and encompass certain generic elements, whilst still being adaptable enough to remain functional in a transforming workplace. This dissertation might also be criticised for not addressing genre and power relations in enough detail. However, I see this dissertation as filling an important gap as currently research on PAIs from a discourse or linguistic perspective is almost non-existent. This study is an attempt to firstly identify the features of this genre, and secondly, inquire as to how PAIs are linguistically accomplished. Currently, little variation is detected in the generic features of PAIs discussed here and in the HR and management journals. The existing literature comments, for example, on features such as ratings systems, goal setting, and employee participation. This study was an attempt to investigate the relevance of such features, determining if they constitute the genre in the South African context, specifically, while also showing some of the competing features that exist. Studies from a critical perspective can build on this dissertation.

### **7.1.2 The applicability of SSA to organisational discourse**

The findings reported in Chapter 6 support the argument that SSA should not be discounted in the investigation of organisation discourse. Giving participants the freedom and the opportunity to tell small stories undoubtedly contributed to the richness of the data as it allowed them to answer questions and clarify statements in a way that they felt comfortable with. From the analysis, it is evident that SSA is not only valuable in terms of investigating individual identity, but also as a tool for exploring expressions of group membership and modes of belonging to CofPs. In addition, the use of SSA led to a better understanding of abstract concepts such as *company identity* and *company culture*. Small stories were used to draw attention to power relations within organisations, to identify hierarchies within CofPs, to explicate the complex process of acquiring and maintaining membership, to express desires of belonging (or not belonging) to certain groups, and to offer evaluations on certain matters. In addition, the use of SSA in this dissertation created a platform for the analysis of perceptions regarding, for example, organisational structures and provided additional insights regarding participants' world views or *figured worlds*. The process of transformation in the post-apartheid workplace was also made visible in comparing stories told along a historical timeline. Differences in stories revealed that transformative practices co-exist with old practices, perceptions and stereotypes. Furthermore, this analytical tool served as a vehicle for the introduction of competing discourses and revealed aspects of multi-voicedness within

these discourses. In light of these findings, it is clear that the value of SSA (especially outside of the narrative framework) has been greatly underestimated up until now. The findings reported through the use of SSA led to several questions regarding the application of CofP theory to the diverse setting of workplaces in the Western Cape.

### **7.1.3 CofP theory in the setting of the Western Cape workplace**

Research question 3 concerned the degree to which participants constructed themselves to be part of a community, while research question 4 inquired about the role that language plays in the construction of identity and membership to CofPs in the workplace. As explained in section 7.1.2 above, this dissertation proved that much insight into CofPs is to be gained by exploring the stories and examples offered by participants following the five steps of SSA.

The findings of this study show that by telling small stories, and by the degree of participation in the focus group discussions, participants made it abundantly clear whether they considered themselves to be full members, peripheral members, or outsiders to CofPs within their workplace, simultaneously acknowledging that CofPs do indeed exist. The findings revealed that language is broadly considered as a boundary object to CofP and plays a significant part in acquiring membership to a CofP. The data revealed that companies try to implement their own language policies in an attempt to manage diversity, but that these policies prove to be problematic in the sense that they are difficult to adhere to and often impractical. Instead, the choice of language is constantly negotiated by interactants in specific moments. Other participants deny the fact that a language barrier exists, i.e. that language leads to the exclusion of some individuals in certain teams, or that low proficiency in L2 leads to compromised communication and influences performance in some instances. The data show a tendency of identifying L1 speakers of African languages as the most probable candidates to be involved in laboured communication and/or communication difficulties, although L1 speakers of Afrikaans with low L2 (English) proficiency also seem to experience communication difficulties in the workplace. Conversely, individual cases show that L1 speakers of English struggle in groups where Afrikaans is the dominant language. To a lesser degree, culture was identified as another boundary object by some managers, while the majority of the participating employees claimed that they do not perceive culture to influence relationships and communication within the workplace. It should, however, be noted that this dissertation did not set out to explicitly investigate the role that culture plays in the workplace

and therefore the possible impact of culture on membership to a CofP is not discussed in much detail.

#### **7.1.4 CofP: Theoretical considerations**

The findings of Chapter 6 indicate that CofP theory as it currently exists seems to be a little narrow with regards to explicating the nature of CofPs in the diverse workplace of the Western Cape. Wenger and other CofP theorists portray CofPs as rather conventional social constructs. In light of the findings of this study I found the theory rather limited or unclear in the following ways:

Firstly, CofP theory portrays old-timers as members of a CofP associated with status and a certain degree of power. It does not account for communities in the process of transformation, in which old-timers become segregated due to language and cultural barriers or due to a lack of knowledge of modern technology and skills. In some cases it seems as if newcomers have a disregard for the expertise of the old-timers, thus making it difficult not only to acquire membership to a CofP, but also to maintain such membership. In this way, the findings of Chapter 6 reveal that the notion of CofP does not adequately address the effects of power and hierarchy (internal and external) on the construction and the maintenance of a CofP.

Secondly, the current notion of a CofP underestimates the vital role that language and language policies play in membership and participation within communities, as well as the maintenance of such communities.

Thirdly, CofP theory does not account for the varying instantiations of workplace communities as seen specifically in the case of Company C. As an outsider and objective observer, I was unable to identify concrete CofPs within this organisation. The concept of community in this company seems to be rather unconventional – participants referred to their company as social, and spoke of regularly meeting for drinks after work, but at the same time expressed no desire to participate in workplace communication and meetings. This is particularly surprising as Company C is smaller and less diverse in terms of L1s than Companies A and B. I am, however, not in a position to deny the existence of CofPs within this organisation, as CofPs probably do exist, but are not as conformist as predicted by CofP theory. The reason for this vagueness may be that CofP theory does not identify different *types* of CofPs in terms of their function and structure. The latter is closely related to the

argument that the spatial reach of a CofP remains undetermined – Company C is a consultancy company and works closely with representatives of other organisations. A further impact on the relationship between members may be that they are competitors in the workplace. Therefore, one could argue that CofP theory does not take into consideration the nature of certain professions and the impact thereof on the relationships between members and non-members.

Correspondingly, I find the notion of *passion* problematic in the current definition of a CofP as it is quite probable that lower level employees (for example cleaning staff, employees in a call centre environment or telesales personnel) may very well have settled for their current positions as they were unable to qualify for more satisfying positions or unable to find other work. Even though they share job titles with other employees in the same position, they are not so much engaged in a shared practice as they principally function on their own – cleaning their own section, or sitting at an isolated workstation with a headset on, making their own calls, chasing a target number in order to earn commission – thus not participating in teamwork in a conventional way (and, indeed, many employees within Company C find themselves in this position). Therefore, I would like to argue that passion is not necessarily a determining factor in the construction of CofPs.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that this theory needs to be revised in terms of its definition, the differentiating purposes, structures, and spatial reach of different communities, the impact of specific boundary objects in specific contextual settings, and the maintenance of CofPs in relation to transformation. Such revisions will subsequently result in a more adequate description and understanding of communities within a more culturally and linguistically diverse workplace.

## **7.2 Limitations and methodological evaluation of the present study**

Initially, this study was meant to investigate the use of English as a lingua franca in the Western Cape workplace; therefore all interviews were conducted in English. However, as the data collection progressed, it became evident that, in spite of the companies' language policies, Afrikaans still features as a dominant language among different groups and departments within these companies. In retrospect, if all interviews had been conducted in the participant's L1, some participants may have been more comfortable expressing themselves

and fewer instances in the data would have been classified as unclear or ambiguous. This alteration would most probably have led to even richer data. The range of participants' proficiency in English was, however, taken into consideration and participants were asked before each interview if they were comfortable with the interview being in English, to which all participants replied in the affirmative. However, two participants answered the questions in Afrikaans, proving that although they answered "yes", in reality they prefer communicating in their L1. Others made use of code-switching to clarify their intentions in some instances. In FG2, it also appeared that some of the participants limited their inputs as they seemed slightly embarrassed about their English proficiency.

Prior to meeting with the participants of FG1, I was unaware that a manager would be participating in the discussion. It is highly likely that this had a negative effect on participation – if all the participants were of the same employment level, they would most likely have participated more freely.

Another limitation to the present study is that I did not anticipate the dominant presence of ratings discussions in PAIs, and therefore neglected to include this feature of a typical PAI in the hypothetical role-play scenario. Due to this exclusion the study did not elicit sufficient information on exactly how managers would go about addressing, for example, a conflict in ratings. The current scenario sketched for participants is consequently more representative of ad hoc (less formal) PAIs. However, I do not deem this exclusion to be a major limitation of the study as the interview schedules were semi-structured and allowed the participants to inform me of the aspects of a PAI that they perceived to be vital in terms of PAs. A vast majority of the participating managers emphasised that a PAI would typically involve the discussion of ratings; however, only a few managers gave examples of how a ratings discussion would typically be approached and structured. Unfortunately, the data do not include enough such examples to draw a comparison across all three participating companies.

Authentic data would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of speech acts and linguistic strategies used in PAI. However, I do not wish to downplay the importance of the methodology and the nature of the data used in the current study, since the interviews and focus group discussions led to invaluable information regarding how these processes are perceived by participants. Therefore, I would like to suggest combining the analysis of authentic data with post-PAI interviews with both the manager and the employee, to

determine what actually happened during the PAI, and how it was perceived and internalised by the participants. It might be difficult to obtain authentic data, though, as PAIs are regarded as highly sensitive and confidential.

As this study was conducted from a linguistic perspective, it did not emphasise the notions of situated learning and knowledge transfer which are prominent features of typical CofP studies. Although situated learning as focal point is more characteristic of business studies, an understanding of this could have led to a better understanding of CofPs in Company C in particular. Ideally, however, an ethnographic study would have been better suited to investigating how situated learning and knowledge transfer occur within companies. Additionally, one could argue that it would have been better to have selected a more diverse company instead of Company C, which compares in size and in terms of diversity to the other two companies; on the other hand, the inclusion of Company C made it possible to show that smaller, less diverse companies also struggle with issues of membership and participation.

### **7.3 Practical recommendations**

In light of the findings of the current study, I urge organisations to rethink their language policies – it may seem practical to resort to one language as a middle ground in terms of group meetings, but the data showed that such policies often prove to be impractical, especially if the designated language for group meetings is not the L1 of any of the participants present in the meeting. In addition, I strongly believe that impartial interpreters should be used more frequently, in order to assist in the objective transfer of meaning, and to liberate managers from the time consuming, frustrating and demanding task of being solely responsible for the clear communication currently expected of them.

Furthermore, in my view, each company should have set guidelines and principles in place regarding their PAIs but it is impractical to assume that all departments' PAIs should have the same, set structure. The data clearly showed that PAIs have different functions across departments and in different contexts, and that the function of PAIs consequently influences the structure and the frequency of PAIs. It should thus be communicated to employees what the exact function of the PAI is and why their PAI procedures differ from those employed in others departments, in order for them not to perceive such differences as unequal treatment. The data have shown, for example, that in some instances lower level employees are only

expected to participate in one formal performance assessment per year, whereas other employees working in a factory-like setting have group meetings at the start of each day. In some departments lower level employees are not given the opportunity to participate in self-rating activities; therefore they are not granted the same level of participation as employees of a higher level.

As an outsider, I immediately noticed differences between managers who had been in their positions longer and managers who were newcomers to managerial roles. I would like to stress that it is essential for such newcomers to receive the required training in conducting PAIs, especially managers coming from vastly different professional backgrounds. This is necessary in order to enjoy maximum functionality of the process, for employees to be evaluated fairly, and to ultimately provide a platform for employee development and performance enhancement. If PAIs are not conducted appropriately, this might very well lead to them being deemed meaningless or of little value. Additionally, I would like to stress the importance of encouraging employee participation, especially in terms of ratings and being able to freely address their concerns, as it is cardinal to employee empowerment and perceptions of inclusion.

#### **7.4 Suggestions for further research**

This dissertation emphasised the fact that very little attention has been given to the construction of PAI discourses in general, and, more specifically, to PAIs within the South African workplace. This is surprising as local workplaces have actively been transforming since 1994, therefore rendering past research outdated and largely irrelevant to modern-day workplace contexts. To date, the functionality of PAIs has elicited conflicting responses, not only in the data, but in the existing literature in general. Considering the lack of research on the topic, I suggest that the perceived advantages and disadvantages of PAIs be further investigated before concluding that the concept of PA is in itself flawed (Spangenberg, 1994). Researchers should also critically assess the use of typical Western measuring instruments for performance evaluation in the African workplace. Some researchers suggest, for example, that the cultural values of *ubuntu* (defined as an African philosophy focusing on the relations and allegiances of people) should be incorporated into the design of future PA programmes (Jackson and Haines, 2007).

As this kind of research is still very new in South Africa, it seems as if managers are particularly hesitant to participate in such studies and instead act as gatekeepers, protecting their companies. In order for researchers to obtain access to actual PAIs (or recordings of PAIs), as Holmes (2007) has done in New Zealand workplaces, business organisations should be made aware of the importance and the potential benefits of the research that would be enabled by providing such access to researchers. I also recommend an analysis of the documents used in PAs as this would lead to a more comprehensive understanding of such organisational processes. In particular, ethnographic studies might provide a richer account of the process as it will be useful to contextualise employees' stances in the interviews and to situate the data within each company's culture and organisation structure. This will enable researchers to engage more fully with the notions of power and agency in business organisations. For the analysis of future authentic data it could also be extremely relevant to trace the evolution of PAIs within a company for contextualisation purposes, as well as for a clearer understanding of interviewees' stances. Researchers may want to refer to Heller (2007) for more information on the sociolinguistics of structuration, and to Bhatia and Evangelisti (2011) for the notion of corporate citizenship.

From an applied or policy standpoint, this dissertation highlights the value of using strategic instruments like PAIs as heuristic for gauging workplace transformation, integration, harmony and diversity management (in terms of extent, dynamics, challenges) in post-apartheid South Africa, especially in view of legislative documents such as the South African Labour Relations Act, the Employment Equity Act, the Constitution, Black Economic Empowerment and the Western Cape Language Policy. These documents are aimed at improved employment conditions, specifically for groups that were previously marginalised in the workplace. The data reveal strategies for achieving membership of desired CofP's. This thematic multi-voicedness and discursive struggles in the data suggest that, at this point in time, the objectives of workplace transformation as envisioned in legislative frameworks are not yet achieved. Based on the findings of this study I would suggest that the connection between the realisation and perception of strategic organisational instruments (e.g. PAIs) on the one hand, and the nature of transformation on the other, is something that deserves to be pursued in future research.

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## APPENDIX A: BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

For research by Tamiryn Jones

PhD in Linguistics

Department of General Linguistics, Stellenbosch University

**All information on this questionnaire will remain confidential**

### A. Personal Information

Surname: \_\_\_\_\_ First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex:  Male  
 Female

Year of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth: City \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Country: \_\_\_\_\_

If you were not born in South Africa, how long have you been living here? \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Education: Highest degree obtained:  Grade .....  
 University/College degree/diploma

### B. First Language (mother tongue)

What is your first language? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the first language of: your mother? \_\_\_\_\_

and your father? \_\_\_\_\_

Which language(s) did you speak at home as a child?

\_\_\_\_\_

Is your first language the language with which you are the most comfortable?  Yes  No

If you answered “No” to the question above, please explain:

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**C. Second Language:**

What is your second language? \_\_\_\_\_

For how long have you been exposed to this language?

---

For how long have you received instruction in this language? \_\_\_\_\_

Approximately how many hours a week do you use your second language?

---

**D. Education and Language Use**

Which language(s) were you formally educated in? Where (i.e. city - country)?

	Language	City / Country
<b>Primary/Elementary School</b>		
<b>High School</b>		
<b>College</b>		
<b>University</b>		

Which language(s) do you use:

at home \_\_\_\_\_

at work \_\_\_\_\_

in social situations \_\_\_\_\_

**E. Work**

Which language does your manager use when talking to you?

---

Do you feel comfortable communicating in this language?

---

Which language do you use when talking to your manager?

\_\_\_\_\_

Why?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Which language would you like to use predominantly at work?

\_\_\_\_\_

Why?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Please rate your linguistic ability in the following languages: English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, and any other languages that you know (please specify).**

Please use the following abbreviations:

**L** = low (badly)

**I** = intermediate (good)

**A** = advanced (very good)

**NN** = near native (excellent)

<b>Language</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Afrikaans</b>	<b>isiXhosa</b>	<b>Other:</b> _____	<b>Other:</b> _____
<b>Reading</b>					
<b>Writing</b>					
<b>Speaking</b>					
<b>Listening</b>					
<b>Overall Competence</b>					

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (MANAGERS)

### Interview schedule (Managers)

#### General information:

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Position in company: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Number of years in current position: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Language information:

7. First language: \_\_\_\_\_
8. First language of mother: \_\_\_\_\_
9. First language of father: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Is your first language the language you are most comfortable with? \_\_\_\_\_
11. If "No", please explain: \_\_\_\_\_
12. Second language: \_\_\_\_\_
13. How long have you been exposed to your second language: \_\_\_\_\_
14. Which language(s) were you formally educated in?
  - Primary school –
  - High School –
  - College –
  - University –
15. Language predominantly used in the workplace : \_\_\_\_\_
16. Language predominantly used with fellow managers: \_\_\_\_\_
17. Language predominantly used with lower-level employees: \_\_\_\_\_
18. Language predominantly used at home: \_\_\_\_\_
19. Language predominantly used in social situations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Feedback on performance:**

20. Briefly explain how you give lower level employees feedback on their performance / gave feedback in the past?
21. How would you give negative feedback (i.e. feedback on aspects of the employee's performance that can be improved)?
22. How do you handle giving positive feedback (i.e. feedback on aspects of the employee's performance that are satisfactory)?
23. How do you experience such feedback discussions with employees?
24. What kind of responses do you get from employees when giving them feedback on their performance?
25. If the employee you are communicating with is a first language speaker of another language, do you discuss his performance in his first language or in yours?
26. Do you ever switch between languages during such discussions?
27. Which factors do you think contribute to a successful discussion? And to an unsuccessful one?
28. Do you think that language and culture can influence how effective communication is during such discussions?

29. If yes, how do you think language and/or culture influence the effectiveness of communication?
30. Do you think that misunderstandings sometimes occur between the manager and employee during such discussions?
31. If yes, do you think that this may be due to the manager and the employee speaking different first languages / coming from different cultures?
- 32. How would you address the following issues while providing feedback on performance?**

The employee is

- highly enthusiastic,
- very innovative with regards to problem solving,
- always well presented, and
- has a good relationship with his/her co-workers.

However, he/she

- often over-indulges in social chit-chat during office hours,
- has a nasty habit of taking too many personal days and
- frequently misses deadlines.

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (FOCUS GROUP/EMPLOYEES)

**Focus group** \_\_\_\_\_ **(Employees)**

**(Each employee will complete a language background questionnaire)**

1. In which language do you and your manager communicate when discussing your performance? Do you sometimes switch between languages during such discussions?
2. How do you feel when you are receiving feedback on your performance?
3. How do you respond to positive feedback, for example when a manager compliments you on the efficient way you manage your tasks or praises/compliments you for the quality of your work?
4. How do you respond to negative feedback, for example, when a manager tells you that he/she is unhappy with some aspect of your work, or that they expect more from you?
5. How would you ideally want a manager to give negative feedback?
6. Which factors do you think contribute to a successful discussion about performance? And to an unsuccessful one?
7. Do you think that language and culture can influence how effective communication is during such discussions?
8. If yes, how do you think language and/or culture influence the effectiveness of communication?
9. Do you think that misunderstandings sometimes occur between the manager and employee during such discussions?
10. If yes, do you think that this may be due to the manager and the employee speaking different first languages / coming from different cultures?

11. Imagine for a moment that you are a manager.

**12. How would you address the following issues while providing feedback on performance to an employee?**

The employee is

- highly enthusiastic,
- very innovative with regards to problem solving,
- always well presented, and
- has a good relationship with his/her co-workers.

However, he/she

- often over-indulges in social chit-chat during office hours,
- has a nasty habit of taking too many personal days and
- frequently misses deadlines.



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Ms T Jones

### LETTER OF ETHICS CLEARANCE

With regards to your application, I would like to inform you that the project, *Linguistic strategies used in performance assessment in South African workplace with English as lingua franca*, has been approved on condition that:

1. The researcher/s remain within the procedures and protocols indicated in the proposal;
2. The researcher/s stay within the boundaries of applicable national legislation, institutional guidelines, and applicable standards of scientific rigor that are followed within this field of study and that
3. Any substantive changes to this research project should be brought to the attention of the Ethics Committee with a view to obtain ethical clearance for it.

We wish you success with your research activities.

Best regards



*Sidney Engelbrecht*

**MR/SF ENGELBRECHT**

**Secretary: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanoria)**

