

*Citizenship as a Communicative Achievement: Social positioning in
Participatory Discourse*

General interest panel of the 9th IPrA Conference, July 10 – 15, 2005, Riva del
Garda

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Abstract and Schedule

Abstract

In the last decades, ‘participation’ has become one of the dazzling key words whenever the democratic deficit of modern societies is moaned about. It refers to various efforts undertaken to let and to make citizens take part in politically and socially contested decision-making processes (concerning the controlling and regulation of, for instance, the application of new and ‘risky’ technologies, environmental policies or serious changes at urban/regional/national/transnational levels). Participatory discourse emerges when the decision making process in one way or another accounts for the ‘public’ to be included. It aims at ‘citizenship’ as a mode of including people in the political system that goes beyond the formal mechanisms of representative democracy in favour of ‘good governance’.

Participatory discourse comprises a broad variety of communicative events: oral arenas of debating between experts, politicians and the public as well as written objections and/or letters by concerned citizens as well as question-answer pairs on governmental websites, face-to-face interaction as well as mass media communication, formal as well as informal gatherings, singularly occurring local meetings as well as regularly occurring gatherings of focus groups.

Up to now, the issue of participation, citizenship and governance has been almost exclusively dealt with in social and political sciences, mostly at a normative and/or abstract level of political theory. Many books have been written about the relationship between persons and society, many different versions of citizenship have accordingly been proposed (take, for instance, Marshall’s ‘Citizenship and Social Class’, Barber’s notion of ‘Strong Democracy’, Philip Frankfeld’s concept of ‘technological citizenship’ or, more recently, Phillippe Schmitter’s concept of different positions or ‘holders’). Apart from its prominent role in political theory, citizenship also came into focus at the level of practical reflection about the

improving of policy strategies in the sense of 'good governance' (take, for instance, the EU white papers on governance and citizenship).

Given this actual relevance of the issue in social and political sciences, it is striking that citizenship has scarcely become a topic of research in linguistics and pragmatics concerned with the relationship between discourse and society. Accordingly, there is some kind of empirical deficit in research about citizenship: Compared with its relevance in terms of political norms and values, the concrete communication of citizenship in actual communication processes appears to be more or less neglected. This exactly makes the point where linguistic and pragmatics can step in: What does it mean to be treated as and to act as a *citizen*? Which are the category-specific activities connected with the social category or the social position of *citizen*? Which are the images of selves and others that are communicated within citizenship talk and citizenship semantics? These questions already indicate that and how citizenship can become a topic for linguistics and pragmatics: namely, by asking if and how citizenship is actually communicated as a relevant social concept by participants themselves. Citizenship then emerges as a communicative achievement depending on verbal means and forms.

The socio-linguistic and pragmatic know how about social positioning, identity construction and membership categorization that has been successfully developed particularly in the last decade by Conversation Analysis (putting forward Sack's early studies in membership categorization devices), Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, van Dijk, Wodak and others), and Discursive Psychology (Harré, Edwards, Potter and others) - to name only a few important strands of analysis - makes it easy to meet the methodological and methodic challenges of citizenship as a communicative achievement. Focusing on empirical manifestations of social positions in participatory discourse, these approaches promise to give insight into the communicative emerging of citizenship in terms of concrete communication structures. Particularly the focus on participatory discourse and its communicative appearances as the most prominent area of citizenship (s. above) allows to show that and how micro-analytical linguistic approaches can contribute to a better understanding of the chances and the boundaries of participation.

The proposed panel is meant to bring together results from studies that

- use linguistic methods (from different strands of pragmatics and discourse analysis) to
- look at the communicative emerging of social positions which are connected to citizenship and

- are based on empirical data from participatory discourse (no matter which kind of thematic issue is concerned).

The idea of the panel goes back to an interdisciplinary EU research consortium of British, Dutch, German, Hungarian, Irish, Italian and Swedish scholars from linguistics, sociology and political science who have conducted a comparative study on participatory discourse in the context of modern biotechnology applications (“Participation and the Dynamics of Social Positioning” (PARADYS); for detailed information see: http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/iwt/paradys/English_start.html). Members of this research consortium will submit papers to be presented on the panel. The panel is, of course, in no way meant to be exclusive for members of this project but is open for all interested in the issue of social positioning in participatory discourse.

Schedule

Friday, 15 July 2005

11:00 – 11:15	Introduction	Heiko Hausendorf
11:15 – 11:50	Social Positioning and Perspectivation in Verbal Interaction	Werner Kallmeyer
11:50 – 12:25	Talking like a Citizen: Examples From the Debate over Experiments with Genetically Modified Plants	Elena Collavin
12:25 – 13:00	Citizen Talk in Participatory Discourse on GMOs	Henrike Padmos
13 – 14	Lunch	
14:00 – 14:35	Towards a Pragmatic Sociology: Discourses of Citizenship in Public Participation on GM Foods in Britain and Ireland	Patrick O'Mahony
14:35 – 15:10	Conflicting Forms of Citizenship? Corporative Citizenship and Direct Citizenship in the Swedish GMO Discourse	Henrik Rahm
15:10 – 15:30	Final Discussion	All Participants