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Review of Weizmann, Elda. (2008), Positioning in Media Dialogue: Negotiating roles in the news interview

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ELDA WEIZMAN. *Positioning in Media Dialogue: Negotiating roles in the news interview*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008. xiv + 209. Hardbound and ebook EUR 99.00 / USD 149.00.

This book presents an investigation of interactional discourse features of news interviews in Israeli (Hebrew) television media, focussing on the way interviewers and interviewees are discursively positioned with respect to each other. The study is based on two sets of data, comprising a 24-hour corpus of news interviews from the "New Evening" (*Erev Xadash*) program on Israeli national television, and a corpus of meta-comments from leading Israeli media figures. The author first presents an overview of research on news interviews (chapter 1), and introduces the notions of positioning (chapter 2) and 'challenging' in this context (chapter 3). She then focuses on three particular discourse patterns relevant to the news interviews in her corpus: discourse norms and expectations surrounding interactional roles (chapter 4); irony (chapter 5); and the use of terms of address to frame challenges (chapter 6). Three case studies from the corpus, which exemplify those discourse patterns, are discussed, after which Weizmann delivers her conclusions on the methodological approach and the insights gained from the study.

The study takes an "integrated pragmatic approach" (pp.7-8), which in this instance means that perspectives and methods from pragmatics and other traditions (including the more recent work of 'positioning theorists') are selected according to the particular analysis that is needed. For example, Weizmann uses the conversation analysis principles of Sacks, Schegloff, Greatbatch & Heritage; cites much sociolinguistic work on dialogic interaction in the media (e.g. Heritage & Greatbatch, Bull, Clayman, Scannell); and follows a Gricean perspective on interactional logic, especially in her discussion of irony.

From the diversity and heterogeneity of socio-pragmatic approaches to studying news interviews, Weizmann helpfully identifies four common principles which she then uses as a foundation both to theorise where news interviews are located in relation to other kinds of discourses, and to motivate the selection of frameworks that are most useful for the discourse analysis of news interviews. These principles are: the importance of interpreting discourse patterns in their cultural context; the use of detailed textual analysis without *a priori* determinations of categories of discourse patterns; a view of news interviews as interactions in which positions and meanings are negotiated dynamically; and a view of interactional practices as culture-dependent (pp.6-7). This locating of news interviews with respect to discourse in general and discourse analysis in particular is a very constructive outcome of her literature review and methodology section. Her survey of the relevant literature is otherwise rather dispersed throughout the book, as each chapter has its own treatment of the literature (e.g. in relation to the notions of challenge, irony, or terms of address).

In a number of places Weizmann describes her study as a "fine-grained textual analysis" (e.g. p.176), and although she certainly discusses the data in considerable detail and arrives at plausible conclusions about it, evidence of "fine-grained textual analysis" is not made available for scrutiny. The data that are presented are given in the form of interview transcripts used to illustrate points as they arise in the discussion, and also presented as appendices. It is not clear what kind of textual analysis has been undertaken beyond intuitive and impressionistic readings of the texts. Weizmann herself acknowledges that

she used different units of analysis for each different discursive feature she explored, e.g. terms of address for the analysis of terms of address; pairs of turns and even more extended stretches of discourse in the chapter on irony; whole interviews as units of analysis for investigating the dynamic developments and tensions between confrontation and cooperation (p.176).

A further cause of reservations about Weizmann's approach to the data is that, while she acknowledges the culture-dependency of interactional norms and practices, and the importance of interpreting discourse patterns in light of their cultural environment, she gives only the barest contextual background to the data under investigation. Given that the context of the data is not widely known in media discourse research in English (although Weizmann and Blum-Kulka have contributed much to the literature on discursive practices in Hebrew; see e.g. Blum-Kulka 1983; Blumk-Kulka & Weizmann 2003; Weizmann 2001; 2006), it would have been helpful to provide at least some contextualisation of the data (e.g. the character of the various broadcasters, the nature of Israeli television in general and its relationship to the people and the state). That would offer readers more opportunity to test Weizmann's claims about the ordinariness or extraordinariness of particular patterns or features in the examples and case studies. It would also increase the value of the study for cross-linguistic comparisons of interactional features in news interview discourse.

Despite the reservations expressed above, the book is valuable in that it constitutes a coherent collection in English of Weizmann's focussed work on Israeli television interview data (parts of which she has also published in Hebrew and French). The analysis is close and detailed (albeit not clearly 'fine-grained' in terms of units of analysis or analytical framework), and so it not only offers insights into the positioning strategies of participants in television interviews (in particular the findings on irony), but it also serves as a rich source of linguistic description of the interactive practices of media and political personalities in Israel.

There are also some intriguing suggestions of historical shifts towards 'conversationalisation' of news interviews, not just in Israeli television but across cultures, a trend that Fairclough (1995) has previously identified. In Weizmann's data, this trend is manifested in the way violations of discourse expectations seem to be allowable for both interviewer and interviewee alike, and do not cause the kind of acknowledgement or repair that one would expect if there were a lesser degree of reciprocity between the participants. This finding particularly interests me because the findings of my own research indicate historical shifts in the role of print news journalists also. In a diachronic study of *Sydney Morning Herald* news reports about the ends of wars, it appeared that there was an increased emphasis on the identity of individual journalists and a decreased emphasis on their role as a spokesperson for the news organisation – from "relayers of documents" (Zelizer 1989:73; see also Matheson 2000) to independently warranted interpreters of events (Scott 2008).

In summary, this book offers a worthy contribution to the study of media dialogue in the form of news interviews, and linguists who are interested in the expression and functional use of irony, terms of address, and challenge will surely benefit from the descriptions and insights that this book provides.

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