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Common-sense anti-racism in book group talk: The role of reported speech (v2: 11/1/12)

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Biographical note

Bethan Benwell is a Senior Lecturer in Language and Linguistics at the University of Stirling. She has published chapters and articles on discursive approaches to reading and reception, discourses and representations of masculinity in popular culture, and (with Elizabeth Stokoe, Loughborough University) on tutorial discourse and student identity. She is the editor of Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines (2003, Blackwell), co-author (with Elizabeth Stokoe) of Discourse and Identity (2006, EUP), co-editor (with James Procter and Gemma Robinson) of *Postcolonial Audiences: Readers, Viewers and Reception* (2012, Routledge) and of a Special Issue of *New Formations* (73) 'Reading After Empire' (2011). She was co-investigator (with Kay, Procter and Robinson) on an AHRC-funded project (2007-2010) examining the relationship between readers, location and diaspora literature: http://www.devolvingdiasporas.com/

Common-sense anti-racism in book group talk: The role of reported speech

[submission to *Discourse and Society*]

Abstract

This paper explores the rhetorical accomplishment by British book group members of anti-racist identities through their discussions of fictional texts exploring themes of race and immigration. What I am terming 'common-sense anti-racism' is a social action or stance that is presented as self-evidently taken by speakers (and assumed to be shared by other participants), yet explicitly flagged at the same time. Speakers in book group discussions routinely display enlightened, anti-racist views principally by invoking the figure of the 'racist other' and their reported speech. Reported speech has been argued to possess evaluative or 'editorializing' functions in talk (Buttny 1997; Holt 2000), specifically by 'ascribing words to out-group members as a way to criticize their actions' (Buttny 2003: 107). Moreover, many of the analysed examples of reported speech do not involve explicit markers of quotation or shifts in footing, meaning that the attribution of certain words (and their accompanying values) have to be disambiguated by hearers assumed to share the same views on race and racism. The *implicit* status of the reported speech here does important identity work in consolidating the values of the group and strengthening its membership.

Adopting a broadly ethnomethodological approach, the paper also focuses on the rhetorical work done by the 'common-sense' presentation of anti-racism, its active orientation to the consensus of the group and arguably defensive 'warding off' of potential assumptions about the disposition or stance of the speaker in discussions of race and racism. It questions why *anti-racism* tends to be packaged as an accountable matter in need of some impression management in the way that racism often is, and concludes that this is linked to the way in which it operates in contexts where anxieties around issues of race and racism continue to exist.

Keywords

common sense, anti-racism, book group talk, reported speech, the racist 'other', discourse analysis, ethnomethodology.

Common-sense anti-racism in book group talk: The role of reported speech

This paper emerges out of a three-year AHRC-funded project investigating the relationship between reading, location and migration[1]. Analysing a series of transcribed book group discussions across the UK and in parts of Africa, the Caribbean, India and Canada, one of our main aims has been to explore how various readers in different places respond to contemporary narratives of movement, migration and diaspora (see Benwell, Procter and Robinson, 2012). The choice of 'diasporic fiction' as our set texts, describing the lives of immigrant communities in Britain, such as Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Andrea Levy's *Small Island* means that our groups' discussions are clearly situated within a discursive landscape of British immigration, discourses of race, identity and belonging.

Social and moral functions of book groups

The focus of this particular paper is, however, less upon the issue of literary reception and evaluations of a series of specific texts and their characters, than upon some of the rhetorical, moral and identity work occasioned by the topics of ethnicity, race relations and immigration which tend to emerge in discussions of diasporic fiction in our UK

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[1] Our project, *Devolving Diasporas:* was funded by the AHRC between 2007-2010 and involved researchers from Newcastle University (Procter and Kay) and from the University of Stirling (Benwell and Robinson). We recorded approximately 90 hours worth of book group discussions from 16 groups across a number of continents.

contexts. Elizabeth Long's ethnographic study of women's book clubs has commented in detail upon the book group as a site of identity production. Her study focuses particularly on the interface between a reader's own personal experience and a book's value as a realist text through a process of 'self-recognition' (2003: 153). But self-recognition, of course, is not only an act in and of itself, but also a form of social action and identity *work* in interaction. When we turn to book group discussions, our corpus of data shows how participants locally manage their own presentation of identity and belief in discussions of race and race relations as morally accountable activities.

The main analytical focus of this paper is the rhetorical accomplishment by British book group members of anti-racist identities through their discussions of fictional texts exploring themes of race and immigration. What I am terming 'common-sense anti-racism' is a social action or stance that is presented as self-evidently taken by speakers, yet explicitly flagged at the same time – what Derek Edwards describes as 'designed visibility' (Edwards 1997: 99). Speakers appear to need to establish their enlightened anti-racist credentials and dispel any possibility of being deemed racist in discussions of fictional texts that portray racism. This delicate (and sometimes defensive) stance seems to characterise a particular kind of educated, liberal, white,

western consciousness in relation to issues of immigration[2], particularly in a British context[3].

Common Sense

Common sense is defined by the New Shorter OED as '[g]ood sound practical sense in everyday matters' and '[t]he faculty by which certain beliefs are generally accepted without philosophical enquiry' (1993: 454). Garfinkel describes common-sense knowledge thus: 'socially sanctioned grounds of inference and action that people use in everyday life, and which they assume that other members of the group use in the same way' (1956: 185). Thus 'common sense' is already owned, collectively and consensually held and is a form of knowledge or stance that does not require evidence, research or justification: it is 'ordinary' and 'untutored' (OED online, 2011). For this reason it has great ideological potential: when propositions are rhetorically packaged as 'reasonable' or 'commonsensical', any ideological or biased underpinnings are rendered invisible, and possible alternatives are omitted from the discussion.   In this way, common sense is not merely a category or repository of knowledge, but also operates as a type of reasoning, justification or accounting in its own right. It is a form of rhetoric

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[2] Gilroy (1987: 117) observes that anti-racist movements in the UK have been largely directed and promoted by whites acting in the interests of race relations.

[3] Research in other national contexts, particularly Australia and New Zealand, suggests that racist discourses (particularly those directed towards Indigenous populations) are arguably more prevalent and tolerated, and thus constraints on voicing anti-racist sentiments exist, e.g. Mitchell, Every and Ranzijn 2011; Van den Berg, Wetherell and Houtkoop-Steenstra 2003; Wetherell and Potter 1992.

that is invoked to support a particular view or argument, to naturalise ideological positions, and crucially to suppress debate.

Common-sense reasoning and its functions have been discussed by a number of writers working within the fields of Social and Discursive Psychology and Ethnomethodology – disciplines in which the 'exposure' of commonsense is in many ways central to the analytical enterprise. 'Common-places' – types of well-established moral aphorisms or maxims (Billig 1996: 21), 'shared knowledge' (Edwards 1997: 255), 'mundane reasoning' (Pollner 1987) 'mundane common sense' (Edwards 1997: 52), 'common understandings' (Garfinkel 1967), 'common-sense knowledge' (McHoul and Watson 1984), 'script formulations': 'how actions and events are described as more or less routine or expectable' (Edwards 1994: 211), 'categorial formulations' (Stokoe 2010; 2012): person category references which intrinsically index some kind of intersubjective agreement about them, e.g. 'that sort of laddish bloke', and 'folk theories' (Edwards 1997: 255), are all standard devices for factual accounting and formulating an assumed consensus in interaction (whether one actually exists or not).

One of the interesting properties of common sense is that it simultaneously dispenses with the need for accounting (i.e. if a position is commonsensical it does not need to be justified – it is inevitable, natural and undeniable), whilst being *in and of itself* a form of accounting:

The rhetorical force of this device is that it appears to be invoking self-evident, undeniable, obvious knowledge, while at the same time accomplishing things as so… in a manner that makes denial difficult (Edwards 2007: 256)

The accounting function of common sense is thus, despite its appeal to commonly held beliefs, suggestive of the anticipation of and need to counter a possible 'other view' (Billig 1996) and thus a means of refuting possible counter descriptions.

A variety of discursive forms are associated with the accomplishment or display of common sense in interaction, some of which are rhetorically designed 'to make denial difficult' such as the use of 'extreme case formulations' (Pomerantz 1986), appeals to participant intersubjectivity including elliptical or generalising formulations such as 'y'know' (what Schiffrin 1987: 276 describes as a 'marker of consensual truths') and 'that sort of', general extenders or list completors (Jefferson 1990) such as 'and so on', 'stuff like that', 'etcetera', and, as we shall see shortly, forms of reported speech.

Examples of these discursive forms can be seen in our first example of common-sense anti-racism which shores up the 'taken-for-granted' status of anti-racism within this interactional context:

EXTRACT A

1 **S5**   but (0.5) I mean hhh well I suppose I (0.2) I was (drawn up

2   in) the middle class family (0.6) they <u>we</u>ren't <u>qu</u>ite Posy

3   Simmonds because (0.2) they (.) the wife says to them where

4   are you from? and they both say W<u>i</u>:llesden and she does that

5   stupid thing of saying but where be↑<u>fore</u> that? (2.0) just

6   cause they're br<u>o</u>:wn

(Glasgow WI *White Teeth*)

In this example the speaker appeals to a shared, 'common-sense', non-racist understanding that the view that ethnicity must map exclusively on to nationality is an inaccurate and ignorant one, and in this way the racist view is 'othered' – 'that stupid thing'. This is also a generalised formulation which appeals to shared knowledge about the existence of this familiar, repeated form of racism. The recreation of direct reported speech here simultaneously lends empirical support to the observation (such questions plausibly do occur in reality), and functions to signal the negative evaluation of the reported speaker's views (see also Buttny 1997; Buttny and Williams 2000; Holt 2000; Stokoe and Edwards 2007). The functions of reported speech will be elaborated later in the paper.

EXTRACT B

1 **S1**   I always find it amazing that people say (.) <u>ooh</u> you know the

2   >sort of classic< they come to our country they should be

3   like <u>u</u>:s (0.8) but you know British p<u>e</u>:ople who go abro:ad are

4   ↑↑they going to want to assimilate? Heh heh heh

(Edinburgh PB *White Teeth*)

In this second example, the speaker uses extreme case formulations ('always find it

amazing'), the generalised second person pronoun in the phrase 'y'know', and a form of

reported speech prefaced by 'the sort of classic' in order to voice a belief which is

clichéd, well worn and familiar to listeners.

By contrast, in the following example, we see a display of anti-racism by S6

which is arguably not presented as *tacit* 'common sense' but expounded explicitly as an

opinion and with no evident indication that any of its assumptions are already shared by

its listeners:

EXTRACT C

1 **S6**   yeah yeah but I think what (0.2) what is imp<u>e</u>rative f- for <u>all</u>

2   of us is (.) er (0.4) when the that f<u>e</u>:ar is not to let our

3   fear cloud our judgement

4 **S5**   ah

5 **S6**   and whenever we <u>deal</u> with people er to give them the benefit

6   of the ↑d<u>o</u>:ubt

7 **S5**   yes

8 **S6**   and a nice young man with a b<u>e</u>:ard (.) is (.) maybe just a

9   <nice young man> ↑with a b<u>e</u>:ard (0.2) and he happens to be

10		Mus<u>lim</u>
11	**S5**	yeah
12	**S***	yep
13	**S6**	and we just have to go on <u>liv</u>ing like this
14	**S5**	yes
15		and (0.5) because it's taken so long to re:ach this
16	**S5**	yes
17	**S6**	and <u>I</u> have seen in the <thirty forty> years that I've been
18		<this year it's going to be forty years I've been married
19		(0.2) I've seen there's a <u>huge</u> improvement
20	**S5**	yes
21	**S6**	here and er it's ↑very positive and this is something that we
22		<u>all</u> have to stand up for (.) and not let the fear (0.6) take
23		over and and yes.
24	**S***	yeah
25	**S***	what a good point to end on
26	**S11**	it is yeah <u>lo</u>:vely (0.5) w<u>o</u>:nderful

(Edinburgh PB *White Teeth*)

Indeed, the responses of the other members are indicative that this sequence

of talk occupies the status of a 'point' (l.25) within a debate. It was precisely the almost

unique appearance of *this* form of persuasive anti-racism within our data that alerted me

to the fact that anti-racism is much more normatively packaged as a tacit, common-sense notion within the talk of our book group members.

'New Racism' and common sense racial discourse

And yet, why is it that anti-racism is so uniformly tied to common sense across our data, particularly when common sense has been shown to operate as a way of suppressing dissent? There have been a number of studies into discourse about race which have shown that common sense is a rhetorical manoeuvre which is commonly employed where speakers are keen to distance themselves from any inference that their views might be deemed prejudiced on the basis of race. Most studies of race talk in the past few decades have been oriented to what has been termed 'the new racism', after a study of public discourse about immigration by Martin Barker in 1981. Influential studies of discourse about race and immigration across a range of written and spoken, public and private contexts (Billig, 2001; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Rapley, 1998; Van den Berg et al, 2003; Van Dijk, 1991, 1992; Wetherell and Potter, 1992) have tended to focus on white speakers or writers and a series of rhetorical strategies which anticipate the view that their beliefs (about e.g. immigration, inequality) are likely to be heard as racist (due to their negative presentation of the qualities or actions of particular ethnic groups), and which thus sets out to deny this, either explicitly or implicitly. These rhetorical strategies are designed to offer *reasoned* support for views which might be

deemed racist to avoid the imputation that *irrational*, *race-based* prejudice is what motivates them in a social climate where 'common-places of prejudice… have been removed from dialogue, or public thought' (Billig 1996: 217). Van Dijk (1987), for instance, identifies 'examples' (where specific negative instances relating to e.g. an ethnic minority individual are used to offer empirical substantiation for more generally negative views) and 'apparent concessions' (where sympathy or a positive evaluation is initially directed at one aspect of an ethnic minority group's circumstances before a more damning verdict is offered). Barnes, Palmary and Durrheim (2001) in a study looking at mixed race interactions in informal settings observed a series of strategies deployed by white speakers to manage the potential for their views to be read as racist in the company of a mixed race couple: these included humour, personal experience (again drawing on an empiricist register) and imputing racist views to other people. Edwards (2003) observes a range of strategies linked to the accomplishment of common sense in the talk of white New Zealanders discussing race and immigration, such as appeals to intersubjectivity (y'know), vague and generalising formulations, and the description of consistent experiences (linking to the rational, empirical basis for judgements). Buttny (1997), examining the speech of both white and African American students on an American campus observes that reported speech is used by both groups of students as a way of negatively representing others' actions in the context of troublesome racialized events.

However, we might ask, why does *anti-racism* need rhetorical work to make it presentable? Why might it also be an accountable matter in need of impression management in the way that racism is? Given the 'powerful norms of anti-racism' (Barnes et al, 2001: 326) that currently exist in our society (and particularly across our book groups, where members are largely educated, middle class and liberal in their politics), why isn't anti-racism either so 'taken for granted' that it is truly invisible, or promoted in an opinionated way as we saw in the isolated example above? The active 'common-sense' presentation of anti-racism - securing consensus, avoiding debate, whilst at the same time implicitly countering an 'other' view - is suggestive that it operates in contexts where anxieties around issues of race and racism exist.

Interestingly across our corpus of data, we were able to identify a series of rhetorical strategies linked to the accomplishment of common-sense anti-racism which were remarkably consonant with strategies linked to new racism and the denial of prejudice, including **generalising formulations**, **markers of intersubjective agreement** and **reported speech**. Both 'new' racism and anti-racism are arguably mobilised by the same stigma that attaches to the irrationality of racism and the desire to 'dodge the identity of prejudice' (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 211). Both types of strategy are aimed at achieving membership of the '"moral community" of the non-prejudiced' (Barnes, Palmary and Durrheim, 2001: 324), even if the ultimate motives for this differ. The same rhetorical discourses may thus be deployed in pursuit of

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ideologically opposing goals, an observation that has been replicated in research that has examined how the same rhetorical strategies are often used in pursuit of both racist and anti-racist arguments (Fozdar, 2010; Verkuyten, De Jong and Kees Masson, 2002); so, for example, an 'equality' argument may be invoked to both support and refute the principle of affirmative action. As Billig points out, 'the same common-sense [may] be the location of arguments which contradict one another' (1996: 203). Similarly, the rhetorical function of common sense means that it has an inherently argumentative or 'dilemmatic' structure (Billig et al 1988; Billig 1996), meaning that various common-sense discourses may come into conflict with one another in the form of 'contrary commonplaces' (Billig, 1996: 202) (e.g. 'fairness' vs 'empathy') thus shoring up the commonsensical 'rightness' of two opposing ideological positions on race relations.

More generally, the range of research examining what we might broadly term 'race talk' points to a consistent form of impression management which links a range of dispositions to the topic of race to strategies deployed in mitigating inferences of racism. Any topic which invokes the possibility of race discourse (such as immigration, migrant integration, racism) with or without any suggestion of a prejudiced or racist stance, is likely to be handled with great delicacy and with an awareness of the existence of a series of shared discourses and tropes of which co-participants will also be aware. Whitehead (2009), for instance, observes in a study of race training sessions,

that people orient to what he terms 'racial common sense' while at the same time 'managing how their actions will be understood in the light of it' (329).

We will now turn to an examination of how common-sense anti-racism is commonly accomplished in interaction.

Othering the Racist

A prevalent strategy for the performance of 'common-sense anti-racism' is the process of 'othering' – the construction of an overtly racist group against which the speaker's values are implicitly contrasted. This has resonances with Richard Buttny's work on the use of reported speech in race talk as a means of constructing a 'portrait of the other' (1997: 480), but where Buttny's 'other' is characterised along ethnic lines (a '**racial** other'), our speakers constuct an 'other' which is drawn along ideological ones (the '**racist** other'). This process of self identification contextualises readers' responses to a fictional text in which racism is a dominant theme, and by locating speakers ideologically, also performs important identity work within the group itself.

In this short excerpt, participants have been discussing a kind of common-sense racism that is associated with an older generation and frame their response to the racism portrayed in *Small Island* during the war in terms of their own 'enlightened' and commonsensically non-racist identities.

EXTRACT D

1 **S1**   but I mean ↑people (0.4) still behave that way (.) in 1994 we

2   went on holiday to Tenerife and we went to one of these ↑shows

3   (0.2) and we were at a table with other British people >they

4   were Welsh< in fact (.) and (.) the _Drifters_ came on and I've

5   never heard of them before (.) and they came on and this ma<u>n</u>

6   said to us (.) shall we throw ban<u>a</u>:nas? (0.2) and <u>we</u> didn't

7   understand (.) what he me<u>:</u>ant

8 **S***   HEh heh heh

9 **S1**   so he re↑<u>pea</u>ted it (.)and ex↑<u>plai</u>ned to uhs

10 **S2**   heh hh I don't be<u>lieve</u> that

11 **S1**   but we left about £twenty minutes later you know £we felt £we

12   can't sit here

13 **S2**   well I'm wondering if the Welsh have ch<u>a</u>:nged much because

14   there was a conversation that Danny was having with a Welsh

15   (.) man on holiday last year in Corfu<u>:</u> and <he said I can't

16   believe what that man's saying to me it was just (0.2) you

17   know the way he was talking about the Greek folk n (0.2) you

18   know like (.) it's like you think wh- have ↑these people got

19   no con<u>cep</u>tion…

 (Glasgow WI, _Small Island_)

Here the 'racist other' identities are gradually reified and closed off by a series of

increasingly specific identifiers: firstly the vaguely defined 'people' (line 1), then

'British people' (line 3) and finally the nationally-specific 'Welsh' (line 4), a group of

whom have been making racist jokes about an African American pop group, *The*

Drifters during a holiday in Tenerife. S2 orients to S1's mention of Welsh identity

(lines 3-4) – which is packaged by S1 as an incidental observation, but is arguably

marked by its mention – and retrospectively endows it with homogeneity by linking this

anecdote via a *second story* (Sacks 1992) to another example of racism her friend or

partner, Danny encountered when talking to a Welsh speaker about the Greek

community whilst on holiday in Corfu (lines 14-17). This nationally delineated and

apparently homogenous identity ('the Welsh' (line 13) and 'these people' (line 18))

allows a clear contrast with the Scottish speakers, enabling them to distance themselves

from the racist behaviour described. Reported discourse is used to present both the

damning words of the racist 'other' group as well as to provide direct access to the

unmediated thoughts of the speaker and her party. The recipients (S* and S2) of S1's

story assess the reported speech through laughter (lines 8 and 10), making its evaluative

function explicit, a move observed by Elizabeth Holt (2000) in her analysis of

'concurrent responses to reported speech'.

   Common-sense anti-racism is often constructed by the attribution of racism to an

'other', *older* generation, who are simultaneously exonerated by the fact of being a

product of their historical (and racist) conditions:

EXTRACT E

1 **S1**   I̲ (.) I mean (0.5) my daughters are a̲b̲solutely app̲a̲lled and I

2   was I mean <my parents are well educated (.) em peo↑ple (0.2)

3   and my father has worked widely across the wo:rld (.) but he

4   can come out with some things sometimes that y'know

5   (0.2)leaves me absolutely b̲r̲e̲a̲th̲less and (0.2) totally appals

6   his ↑grandchildren [.hhhh] ↑↑w̲h̲y̲ does he s- ! and he doesn't

7   actually if you pull him u:p

8 **S2**   uhuh

9 **S1**   he's horrified at the thought that anybody would think he was

10   ↑like that but it's just c̲o̲m̲mon (0.4) ↑↑p̲a̲r̲lance to him

 (Glasgow, WI *Small Island*)

What is striking here are the accounts provided for the parents' racism. It is neither ignorance, lack of education or a desire to 'be' racist, but a naturalised outlook and way of talking: 'just common parlance to him'. However, despite this ostensible sympathy (reminiscent of Van Dijk's 'apparent concessions' (1987)) for the unwitting nature of her father's racism, the speaker reveals the imperative of distancing her own stance from any possible imputation of racism by the use of extreme case formulations ('leaves me absolutely breathless', 'totally appals', 'horrified'), her moral account of 'pull[ing] him up', and her own reported speech ('↑↑w̲h̲y̲ does he s[ay]!' line 6) creating a sense of unmediated access to her original appalled response. A similar pattern of exoneration

combined with 'othering' can be observed below where the speaker explicitly characterises her parents' racism as such whilst accounting for it as an inevitable, unwitting product of its time (and thus implicitly constructing anti-racism as a product of *this* time):

EXTRACT F

1 **S1**   <u>well</u> of cou- abs<u>olu</u>tely <but I just (.) I can well I

2   suppose it's things like with my mum and da:d (0.2) I

3   kn<u>o</u>:w they kind of <u>want</u> to know (.) cause my mum and

4   dad are <u>ve</u>ry much of the generation that would have

5   rec<u>ei</u>:ved the people of the (.) on the W<u>i</u>:ndrush

6   really (0.4) and are <u>pre</u>judiced without (.) y'know

7   without even having a ↑<u>clue</u> to the point that

8 **S2**   even knowing it

9 **S1**   mmm (0.2.) they say things like ↑I'm not raciali<u>:</u>st

10   <u>we</u>'re not racialist ↑here

11 **Grp**   Heh heh heh

(Nottingham WT/SI)

Again, reported speech prefaced by generalising particles ('they say things like') is deployed to register disapproval for the views of the unintentionally racist parents. As we saw in extract D, the evaluative function of the reported speech is made explicit

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by the concurrent laughter by the whole group in line 11.

Anti-racism as common knowledge: the role of reported speech

One of the most commonly observed features of common-sense anti-racism across our data, and a phenomenon already noted in much of the data so far examined, is the use of reported speech. Reported speech or quotation has been categorised by Clark and Gerrig (1990) as a kind of 'demonstration': something that is linked to direct experience but mediated by a dramaturgical or role-taking function. Crucially, it is a selective or partial demonstration of some prior event, which may be specific in time or space, or which may be generic, habitual, typified or even hypothetical. Clark and Gerrig observe two main functions for the use of reported speech in talk: **direct experience** and **detachment** (1990: 792). Stokoe and Edwards (2007) have observed both these functions in the use of reported racist insults by complainants to neighbour mediation services or the police, where the reported quote of the racist offender both offers a kind of empirical robustness or 'factuality' (Myers 1999: 382) to their evidence (p.339; see also Buttny 2003: 106; Holt 1996), but also serves to dissociate the speaker from the insult (Clark and Gerrig 1990: 793; see also Buttny 2003: 106; Goffman 1974; Myers 1999: 376), rather offering up the insult to the listener as an indirect assessment of the original speaker's character and motives, commonly in 'complaint' narratives (Buttny, 2003: 106; Holt, 2000: 435-439; Stokoe and Edwards, 2007: 347). The role of reported

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speech in constructing evaluations or assessments is a crucial one in interaction. It has also been observed by Buttny (1997) in his study of racial discourse on a college campus, where he found that speakers would use reported speech overwhelmingly to criticise others, a function we observe most commonly in this study.

Across our data we find a number of realisations of reported speech which reveal a certain consistency of form and function. We have already seen an example of reported speech as a conveyance of direct experience or even direct emotion: '[.hhhh] ↑↑why does he s- !', the sharp intake of breath followed by a high pitched, recreation of an imagined incredulous response by the speaker. However, most of our examples of reported speech have an *ironic* and critical function, serving to characterise the views and voice of usually a racist 'other' as an indirect form of critical commentary and conforms to Buttny's view that 'reported speech is relevantly tied to assessment' (1997: 477). Most of these examples use generalising particles as a way of typifying the speech as habitual, occurring over and over (e.g. 'they say *things like* I'm not racialist we're not racialist here'; 'people say oh you know *the sort of classic* they come to our country they should be like us' (itallics added). These are thus generic referents and hypothetical albeit familiar or 'prototypical' (Buttny, 2003: 105) speech reports of what a certain (often unidentified) group of people are likely to say. By juxtaposing the generalising particles with the reported speech, arguably common sense is being deployed as a way of characterising, stereotyping and stigmatising the racist view.

In the next example, the speaker is characterising the racist views of her mum's Latvian cleaner who is talking about Polish migrants in the UK.

EXTRACT G

1 **S6**   my mum's <u>cle</u>aner is from <u>Lat</u>via (.) and even <u>she</u>'s disgusted

2   by the ignorance of £Polish ∘people∘ and heh ↑↑£you just think

3   that you've been here three £four years >or something< ((high

4   sing-song voice)) ↑↑and they all come <u>o</u>↑ver and they don't

5   wo<u>:</u>↑rk (0.4)there are ↑↑<u>ple</u>nty of <u>jo</u>bs ((normal voice)) (1.0)

6   and you just think ↑okay (.) fair enough (0.2) <which is a

7   sh<u>a</u>:me actually but (   )

8 **S5**   y<u>e</u>:ah.

9 **S6**   it seems a bit strange

 (Edinburgh FB, *Extra Time in Paradise*)

The paralinguistic notes in the transcription itself ('high sing-song voice' and 'normal voice') suggests that the speaker adopts two distinct voices to make the separation between her views and the cleaner's views apparent, given the absence of a reporting verb. The speaker uses direct reported speech (lines 4-5) which lampoons the Latvian cleaner's generalising and arguably racist opinions regarding Polish migrants[4]. The ironic status of the report is evident by S6's use of a high 'sing-

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[4] Ironically, in doing so, she makes a generalising judgement about Latvians.

song' tone to convey the apparently reported speech (though she doesn't mimic an East European accent), a kind of delivery that has been described as having an 'annotative' (Clark and Gerrig 1990: 68), or 'marking' (Mitchell-Kernan, 1972) function which allows such things as prosody, gesture, and facial expression to offer an implicit commentary on the utterance. However, the absence of a reporting verb ('free direct speech' (Leech and Short, 1981: 22); 'zero-quotative' (Yule, Matnis and Hopkins, 1992)) also indexes the speaker's confidence in the shared and 'commonsensical' grounding of her reporting in an anti-racist interpretive context. However, even within the speaker's 'own' words, shades of the cleaner's voice are apparent. Prior to the reported speech, S6 refers to the 'ignorance' of Polish people (line 2), and although she is not directly quoting her cleaner here, it seems apparent from the otherwise anti-racist orientation of the rest of the turn, that the word 'ignorance' is a kind of quotation (arguably a form of free indirect discourse) and not one that S6 would normally deploy.

 Free indirect discourse is a form of indirect speech or thought without reporting clauses and usually constitutes a third person narration (with the attendant grammatical feature of the past tense) which nonetheless conveys the style, tone, views and perspective of the subject of the narration. It is commonly found in literary genres, and used in order to convey the 'colour' and expression of a particular character's view, often as a form of mimicry (see Gunn 2004 for a clear account). It occurs occasionally in these displays of 'common-sense anti-racism' as we will see in further examples.

In the next example, the boundaries between reported speech and non-reported speech are less prosodically explicit:

EXTRACT H

1 **S1**   [and then you get it now excep]t it's about <u>Mu</u>:slims

2 **S2**   [can see now how it goes there]

         (1.0)

3 **S2**   yeh

4 **S1**   all Muslims are <u>bad</u> <anybody (0.2) <u>brown</u> skinned is a <u>Mu</u>slim

5   whether they're Hindus or not doe<u>:</u>sn't matter

6 **S2**   yes

7 **S1**   they're just all lumped together as M<u>u</u>:slims (0.4)and <u>Mu</u>slim

8   equals ba<u>:</u>d

(Glasgow WI, *Small Island*)

In line 4, S1 voices a hearably racist view that 'all Muslims are <u>bad</u> <anybody (0.2) <u>brown</u> skinned is a <u>Mu</u>slim', which we infer is a reported view by the way she then distances herself from it in her critical commentary in lines 5 and 7. Nonetheless, shared, common-sense knowledge that such a view is meant ironically is also crucial to disambiguate it in the absence of any reporting verb or prosodic clues. We can compare this example to a very similar rhetorical move noted by Myers in a study of reported speech in focus group discussions, which he describes as free indirect discourse:

25

2   your multinationals took in Bhopal . and look what happened there… with those poor people…
…

1   it didn't matter did it . cause they were only Indians

2   exactly]

(Myers 1999: 337)

The connections between free indirect speech as a form of reporting and irony have

been frequently documented, particularly in stylistic analyses (Gunn 2004), and the

irony is not hard to detect here, particularly as the speakers in both extracts seem to be

expressing an opinion opposite to that genuinely held by them. Both 'echoic mention'

(Sperber and Wilson, 1981) and 'pretense' (Clark and Gerrig, 1984) theories of irony

capture the verbatim and dramaturgical aspects of reported speech in the examples

examined here. Shoaps (2010: 300) argues that 'irony has more in common with

reported speech than it does with metaphor or negation' and both serve similar functions

in making reference to shared norms and standards (often by contravening them). But

like irony, reported speech has an evasive status, its words dissociated from the current

speaker, and its intentions ultimately ambiguous. It is therefore an ideal mode of

discourse to employ in interactional contexts where topics are liable to invoke

disagreement or where (to quote Myers 1999) 'the views of speakers are not yet

known'. We will return to some of these considerations in the paper's conclusions.

The range of types of reported speech and frequent absence of explicit boundary markers within even a single turn is a useful marker of the intersubjective agreement presumed to exist between speaker and hearer, and a versatile means of establishing an anti-racist stance.

EXTRACT I

1 **S5**   I know it's I mean I kn<u>o</u>:w (.) I've heard people going on that

2   they <u>fo</u>ught the Second World War (0.2) to make the country

3   British >and all this< and now there's all these >Polish

4   people< ↑oh but we're not a<u>gai</u>nst Polish people but it's <u>all</u>

5   (0.2) ↑<u>cri</u>minals that are ↓coming and (.) <u>see</u> their p<u>eo</u>ple are

6   getting br<u>ai</u>:nwashed (0.4)

7 **S1**   yeah [it's interesting

8 **S5**   ['cause it's the <u>me</u>dia

(Edinburgh PB *White Teeth*)

In this example, the boundaries between different forms of reported speech are even more ambiguous, particularly as some are not cued by explicit quotatives. The first bit of reported speech is introduced using a reporting verb 'going on' and begins as **indirect speech**, 'that they <u>fo</u>ught the Second World War', which is curtailed by the dismissive generaliser, 'and all this' (which is uttered with a more 'rushed' delivery signalled by the 'greater than' symbols in the transcript) before morphing imperceptibly

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into a form of **free indirect speech** 'and now there's all these >Polish people<'. In this way, the sentiment 'and now there's all these >Polish people<' could be ambiguously ascribed to an anonymous group who hold the potentially racist views that the speaker is subtly lampooning. Again, the distinction between free indirect and free direct speech is ambiguous here[5]. The fact that these words are presumably not those of the speaker herself can only really be determined by other elements of the discourse context, such as the previously dismissive characterisation of the indirectly reported views of 'people going on' as well as by the **free direct speech** (direct reported speech without a reporting verb), which follows and which is arguably cued as such by the discourse marker, '↑oh': '↑oh but we're not against Polish people'.

The absence of explicit markers of the boundaries between these different kinds of speech has been observed by Myers (1999: 396) as something which listeners are almost always competent to decode, even in the absence of clear cues, but whose interpretations can be recovered from subsequent turns. The shared knowledge that such a conversational strategy invokes is a clear example of common sense rhetoric: 'when speakers demonstrate only a snippet of an event, they tacitly assume that their addressees share the right background to interpret it in the same way they do' (Clark and Gerrig, 1990: 793). Such rhetorical moves also contribute to the establishment of intersubjectivity and affiliation in talk (Holt 2000: 451).

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[5] Holt has remarked that the distinction between direct and indirect forms of reported speech are not always clear cut in interaction (Holt 1996: 243; 2000: 427)

Our next example provides a clear illustration of how such 'embedded' quotations are processed by listeners and deployed to consolidate the anti-racist stance that is being jointly constructed across speaker turns. In this example (from Penzance in Cornwall), racism is attributed to 'the people' (and the definite article here implies a homogenous identity) in respectively Peterborough and London. Earlier in this section of talk, one speaker has described as 'shocking' the way black servicemen were treated after the war, but then another speaker notes that racism still persists in contemporary society:

EXTRACT J

1 **SA**   but you know it it <u>still</u> happe:ns ah in Peter- I used to live

2   in Peterborough (0.2) ∘and er∘ (.) the <u>sa</u>me thing happened (.)

3   ther- the people would say (0.2)<↑ 'f you get one P<u>a</u>:ki> (0.6)

4   (0.4)they're all <u>o</u>:ver the place.

5 **SB**   yes

6 **SA**   ↑one Paki in the str<u>ee</u>t and everybody starts moving on↓ (.)

7   and ↑this is (.) you know (.) <u>ten</u> <u>fif</u>teen years ago. (0.2) so

8   there's <u>no</u>thing (.) <u>cha</u>nged all that much=

9 **SB**   =well it's happening <u>ri</u>ght n<u>ow</u> because I've got people from

10   London on <u>one</u> side and people from London on the ↑<u>oth</u>er side

11   and they've <u>both</u> (.) <u>told</u> me that they've moved here to get

12   away from the ↑∘<u>bla</u>:cks∘ (0.2) and that's happening ↑<u>no</u>:w

13   because this was last y<u>e</u>:ar when they moved in (0.2) so it's

14   <u>still</u> going on

15 **SC** ∘∘and the Cornish are moving to get away from the Londoners∘∘

16 **Group** -s ys Heh heh heh heh

(Penzance, *Small Island*)

These constructions of apparently consistently racist dispositions are signalled by the

habitual tense 'would say' which establishes the 'generic' and 'typified' forms of

reported speech and their functions, and also by the use of the reviled 'hate' term:

'Paki'. These are used to shore up the contrastive, tacitly anti-racist perspective of the

speakers, whilst simultaneously constructing a particular rural or provincial Cornish

identity. SB's potentially ambiguous mention of 'the ↑∘bla:cks∘' in line 12 is arguably

distanced from the speaker by its quieter yet emphatic and lengthened delivery

combined with a 'surprised' tone, suggesting that this is more akin to reported speech

rather than an expression SB would normally use or an ideology they would ordinarily

subscribe to. An anti-racist interpretation can also be retrieved by the fact that SB's turn

constitutes a 'second story' (Sacks 1992), with designed similarities to SA's story. This

impression is then further consolidated by the final contribution from SC, arguably a

'third story', whose negative representation of the same racist 'Londoners' cited in the

previous turn arguably helps to further disambiguate SB's mention of 'the blacks' in

indirect speech, which is then confirmed by laughter from the whole group (and this is a

good example of how anti-racist meanings, views and ideologies are collaboratively,

sequentially and incrementally worked up in talk - the inverse of Condor's 2006

discussion of how public prejudice is jointly accomplished in interaction). Despite the

potential ambiguity of embedded reported speech, SC's response here suggests that she

interprets SB's speech as reported and thus 'other'.

Conclusions

In this paper I have been interested to explore the forms and functions of common-sense

anti-racism as it is performed and deployed in interaction and particularly through

various forms of reported discourse. I have argued that the 'common' element of

common sense is crucial to an understanding of the 'undeniable' status of anti-racism as

it is accomplished by speakers, as a means of achieving consensus, signalling belonging

of a particular kind of community, and managing potential disagreement. Common

knowledge is less a 'reservoir of shared factual information which exists prior to, and is

built up during, conversation' (Edwards, 1997: 117), but rather, the invocation of

'common knowledge' is a way of talking, of managing intersubjectivity, and achieving

social goals such as presentation management, identity work, persuasion, accounting

and blame.

However, I wish to return to my earlier observation that the 'powerful norms of

anti-racism' (Barnes et al 2001: 326), particularly in the kinds of liberal, educated

contexts of the book club, might lead us to speculate as to why anti-racist stances are

often achieved in talk using the same kind of rhetorical strategies one might associate

with more contested or unpopular stances. In other words, common sense is usually

used to naturalise ideological positions and is suggestive of an interactional need to

counter a possible 'other view'. Myers, in his analysis of the functions of reported

speech in focus group discussions, observed that its distancing properties often serve to

'mediat[e] disagreement' by 'giving participants a way of dealing with possible tensions

and signalling intended frames' (1999: 389).

Whilst most of our examples of common-sense anti-racism seem to offer a

robust alliance to a specific point of view, other examples are a little more ambiguous,

and suggestive (as Myers noted) that anxieties continue to exist around discussions of

race. As Mitchell et al suggest 'challenging racism is unlikely ever to be completely

comfortable' (2011: 339) and similarly Condor concludes '[i]n practice, for ordinary

social actors to openly challenge prejudiced talk as it arises incidentally in the flow of

mundane conversation might seriously jeopardise their relationship with others' (2006:

16). In the following quote, the speaker uses a form of ellipsis ('enough said') which

foreshortens his assessment (and removes potential reported talk).

EXTRACT M

1 **S9**   I mean I related to it (.) quite positively I I liked it but

2   for some of the reasons I touched on before it's set in a part

3   of London where my (0.2) >grandparents lived and my mother grew

4   up< so I knew all those (0.2) areas I remember their reaction

5   to (.)immigrants enough s<u>a</u>:id (0.2) em

(Edinburgh, MBG, *WhiteTeeth*)

One reading of this is that ellipsis indexes shared knowledge, and the assumption that

the listener will be able to supply the 'missing' token (i.e. that their reaction to

immigrants is so objectionable as to be literally censored). Another reading might

suggest that such an abrupt and censoring move operates to suppress discussion or the

articulation of any alternative view, so that ellipsis in this instance sustains ambiguity

around immigration and its evaluation. In other words, the 'common-sense' status of

anti-racism, and its evasive, elliptical properties may, in some circumstances, operate to

accommodate a range of **unknowable** views. The dilemma that arguably prompts the

'common-sense' forms of anti-racism is that **either your interlocutors will need**

convincing that you are not racist, or that the interlocutors themselves cannot be

trusted not to be racist. As Barnes et al observe '[t]he need for a strategy to avoid

inferences of racism means that the risk of such an inference is genuine' (2001: 328).

Similarly Whitehead observes in his study of race training group discussions that

> [I]ndividuals *may* design their actions according to a racial interpretive framework solely as a
> consequence of the expectation that *others* may be using such a framework to interpret their
> actions, and that others may hold them accountable for those actions on the basis of that
> framework. (2009: 339)

In the broad communicative network that is 'race talk' we can see a continuum of common-sense discourse, from strategies of 'new racism', to defensive anticipation of the inference of racial common sense, to positive alignment to an anti-racist identity. All of these stances, frequently accomplished through the collaborative resources of sequential talk, reveal a sensitivity to the powerful stigma of racial prejudice that permeates almost all areas of contemporary social life.

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