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The Coke Side of Life:an Exploration of Pre-Schoolers' Constructions of Product and Selves Through Talk-in-Interaction Around Coca-Cola

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''The Coke side of life'' – an exploration of pre-schoolers' constructions of product and selves through talk-in-interaction around Coca-Cola

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to propose the activity-based focus group as a useful method with which to generate talk-in-interaction among pre-schoolers. Analytically, it aims to illustrate how transcribed talk-in-interaction can be subjected to a discourse analytic lens, to produce insights into how pre-schoolers use ''Coca-Cola'' as a conversational resource with which to build product-related meanings and social selves.*

Design/methodology/approach – *Fourteen activity-based discussion groups with pre-schoolers aged between two and five years have been conducted in a number of settings including privately run Montessori schools and community based preschools in Dublin. The talk generated through these groups has been transcribed using the conventions of conversation analysis (CA). Passages of talk characterized by the topic of Coca-Cola were isolated and a sub-sample of these are analysed here using a CA-informed discourse analytic approach.*

Findings – *A number of linguistic repertoires are drawn on, including health, permission and age. Coca-Cola is constructed as something which is ''bad'' and has the potential to make one ''mad''. It is an occasion-based product permitted by parents for example as a treat, at the cinema or at McDonalds. It can be utilised to build ''age-based'' social selves. ''Big'' boys or girls can drink Coca-Cola but it is not suitable for ''babies''.*

Originality/value – *This paper provides insight into the use of the activity-based focus group as a data generation tool for use with pre-schoolers. A discourse analytic approach to the interpretation of children's talk-in-interaction suggests that the preschool consumer is competent in accessing and employing a consumer artefact such as Coca-Cola as a malleable resource with which to negotiate product meanings and social selves.*

Keywords Focus groups, Infants, Child psychology, Social interaction, Consumers

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Research on the child consumer is located in a variety of disciplines and in recent years a proliferation of publications traversing a range of different perspectives has emerged including socio-historical (Kline, 1993; Cook, 2004), socio-political (Langer, 1999, 2002; Langer and Farrar, 2003; Cook, 2007) communications-based (Seiter, 1993, 2005; Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1997; Banet-Weiser, 2007) and marketing-oriented (Del Vecchio, 1997; Acuff and Reicher, 1997; Sutherland and Thompson, 2003; Siegel *et al.*, 2004). While these publications encapsulate heterogeneity of views regarding the child consumer, the preschool[1] consumer is barely considered. Instead, this age group feature more prominently in discussions and critiques concerning the profitability and potential exploitation of the baby and preschool market by marketing and media institutions (see Linn, 2004; Schor, 2004; and Thomas, 2007).

Theoretical accounts of the child consumer have mainly derived from a psychological perspective (Gunter and Furnham, 1998; McNeal, 1992, 2007). Roedder John's (1999) oft-cited review of 25 years of consumer socialisation research draws on a Piagetian framework and categorises pre-schoolers as being within the perceptual stage of development(age three to seven). Children at this stage are ''simple, expedient and egocentric'' decision makers who ''have difficulty thinking about their own perspective and that of another person simultaneously'' (Roedder John, 1999, p. 187). This assertion might suggest that the consumer researcher will be very limited in scope when it comes to engaging directly with preschoolers, however, alternative perspectives suggest otherwise. Age-stage based socialisation theories have been criticised most notably by Qvortrup *et al.* (1994) along with Corsaro (1997) and James *et al.* (1998) thus instigating a paradigm shift in childhood studies in the 1990's. This paper is grounded in the social competence paradigm which emerged as a result of this critical movement. Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998) argue that this paradigm suggests a picture of childhood which is not linear but rather involves struggles for power, contested meanings and negotiated relationships. Thus ''childhood'' is defined not as a natural phenomenon or stage of life but a historically and culturally variable social construction. Children of all ages are understood as striving to make sense of and participate in their culture as opposed to simply imitating or internalising that culture. Language and cultural routines are central to this perspective (see Corsaro, 2005; James *et al.* 1998).

Greene and Hill (2005, p. 15) argue that given contemporary conceptualisations of children as ''social actors'' and ''as embedded in rich socio-cultural contexts'', researchers need to employ appropriate methods when attempting to understand children's experiences. This paper argues that the activity-based focus group is a useful method with which to research preschool consumers. It makes a clear distinction between data generation and data analysis and aims to illustrate how talk-in-interaction produced in a focus group setting can be transcribed and subsequently subjected to a discourse analytic lens to produce insights into pre-schoolers' constructions of consumer artefacts. Rather than discuss methodological arguments in the abstract this paper aims to illustrate these arguments through an exploration of pre-schoolers' use of the topic ''Coca-Cola'' as a conversational resource with which to build product-related meanings and social selves.

Rationale

Corsaro (2005, p. 131) argues that although studies of consumer culture ''tell us a great deal about children's preferences and their roles in consumer decisions, these studies only rarely and very narrowly explore children's actual use, refinement, and transformation of symbolic and material goods within peer cultures''. He acknowledges, however, that the body of work in this area is now growing. Beryl Langer's work has addressed children's consumer cultures from a variety of perspectives including; children's construction of national identity in a global cultural economy (Langer and Farrar, 2003), the material culture of childhood (Langer, 2005) and the construction of the child consumer by marketers (Langer, 2002). By the time children reach preschool age, they have according to Langer(1994) experienced life both as apprentice consumers and as ''sites'' of consumption. She views children as agentive in their use of the materials of global culture or what she calls ''the taken-for-granted currency of social exchange'' for the construction of the self. She emphasises the fact that while the objects of children's desires are global, they are consumed locally and thus become associated with what it means to be ''home'' and by extension what it means to be part of a peer group (Langer and Farrar, 2003, p. 118). Her work brings into focus the manner in which the social consequences of not keeping on top of changing trends can be detrimental for children as marketers promote inclusion through common allegiance to certain brands and products. While it is impossible for any child to possess every next ''must have'' commodity, value-laden information surrounding the artefacts of consumer culture and the advertising that promotes them has become a cultural resource in itself (Ritson and Elliott, 1999).

This paper addresses Coca-Cola as one such artefact of consumer culture. It is a brand that has managed to remain current and relevant to multiple generations for over a century.

Pendergrast (2000) offers a comprehensive history of the brand and suggests that Coca-Cola is the most widely distributed product on our planet and is the second best known word on earth after ''ok''. This product was one of a variety of branded stimulus materials used to provoke talk-in-interaction around commercial products by pre-schoolers in the ongoing project from which this paper is drawn. Given the ubiquitous nature of the brand it was not surprising to find that children recognized it instantly, the meanings they derived from it however were varied and negotiable and lacked the harmony Coca-Cola promotes so heavily. Some explication and discussion of the research project and data generation methods employed will precede the analytical discussion.

Methodology

This paper emerged from an ongoing study into the construction of social selves and relations by pre-schoolers through talk-in-interaction around brands. The total data set comprises 14 activity-based focus groups, made up of three or four pre-schoolers aged between two and five years and lasting approximately 25 minutes each. The groups were conducted in a number of preschool settings including privately run Montessori schools and community-based preschools in the Dublin area.

Corsaro (2005) points to the emergence of non-traditional methods and techniques along with more child-centred approaches which see children become increasingly integrated into the research process itself. The research approach presented in this paper has been employed in an effort to appreciate the socio-cultural context in which children engage with consumer culture. The focus group provides a research setting in which the subtleties of interaction produced around consumption-oriented topics can be recorded. This interaction can then be carefully transcribed and finally analysed in order to produce an interpretation of how children negotiate the meanings of consumer artefacts, and, in so doing employ these commercial topics as building blocks in the construction of social selves through talk-in-interaction.

Data generation

The basic definition of a focus group as a planned discussion, moderated by a researcher and designed to obtain opinions, ideas and perceptions of a pre-selected group of individuals is fairly non-contentious. However, beyond this basic level of agreement there are differing perspectives on how best to utilise the focus group. These differences can be categorised under two headings:

1. the *status* of focus groups within the methodological toolkit; and

2. the *unit of analysis* as defined by the researcher.

With regard to the status of focus groups some researchers view them as an auxiliary method used to generate data to inform quantitative stages of a project or aid interpretation of quantitative results (Morgan, 1998; Stewart *et al.*, 2007). For others, focus groups are increasingly valued as a stand-alone method used to produce sufficient data to warrant meaningful findings (Puchta and Potter, 2004). With regard to the unit of analysis, many marketing researchers view the focus group interview as synergetic. Thus, while the nature of group dynamics are observed to reveal the interactive work that results in unified answers to the pre-determined questions set forth by the group moderator, the individual participants are the unit of analysis. The report is a collection of insights derived directly from the mouths of the participants (Morgan, 1998, p. 1). In contrast, for other researchers (Tonkiss, 2004, p. 194) the group interaction itself is understood to hold the key to the generation of deeper insights into the phenomenon under study; the unit of analysis is the group rather than the individuals taking part in the discussion (See Freeman, 2009 for a fuller discussion of focus group methodology). The study described here views the group as the unit of analysis and emphasises the importance of utilising the focus group to generate interaction for detailed analysis. The concern is not only with the content of the talk produced but also how it is produced in conversation with others.

Much of the discussion around children's focus groups pertains to how they differ from adult groups. The optimal size of a focus group ranges from recommendations of three up to six participants across a small age-range. Some researchers suggest single sex groups but this usually depends on the content and context of the specific research project (see Mauthner, 1997). As children's cognitive, emotional and social needs are considered prior to the planning of a focus group, it often makes sense to incorporate activities or games to aid interaction and concentration, this is particularly the case when conducting focus groups with children under eight years of age (see Eder and Fingerson, 2003 and Hennessy and Heary, 2005).

The research presented here utilised ''activity-based focus groups'' (Eder and Fingerson, 2003) comprised of preschool children. In order to maintain a sense of cohesion and direction in the group discussion, the optimum number of participants is three or four children per group. Two activities were designed:

1. a ''bingo'' game which used brand logos some of which were specific to children's cultures and some of which were non-specific; and

2. a creativity exercise which involved the children choosing laminated Velcro-backed cards taken from a toy catalogue with which to decorate a felt covered cardboard Christmas tree.

Each session was framed by opening and closing greeting rituals between me and the child participants and lasted anywhere between 15 and 30 minutes. The use of purposely designed activities served to hold the children's attention and generate brand related talk-in-interaction tangential to but potentially stimulated by the activity at hand. These tangential conversations make up the main corpus of closely analysed talk. Utilisation of the focus group method comprises three phases which are depicted in Figure 1.

A degree of overlap is evident across these three phases especially if the research is being moderated, transcribed and analysed by the same researcher. In practice, transcription of focus groups is an iterative process. After an initial transcription phase, interesting passages of talk are identified and isolated for closer transcription and this re-visiting of specific extracts can continue indefinitely.

Data analysis

There is no ''best way'' to go about analysing the talk generated through focus groups but the choice of analytical tool will impact on the emerging interpretation. Puchta and Potter (2004, p. 25) provide a comprehensive overview of analytical approaches to the study of

Figure 1 Focus Group Phases from Freeman, 2009

I
Data Generation
(design and moderation)

III
Analysis
(making sense
of data)

II
Managing Data
(transcription and
organisation)
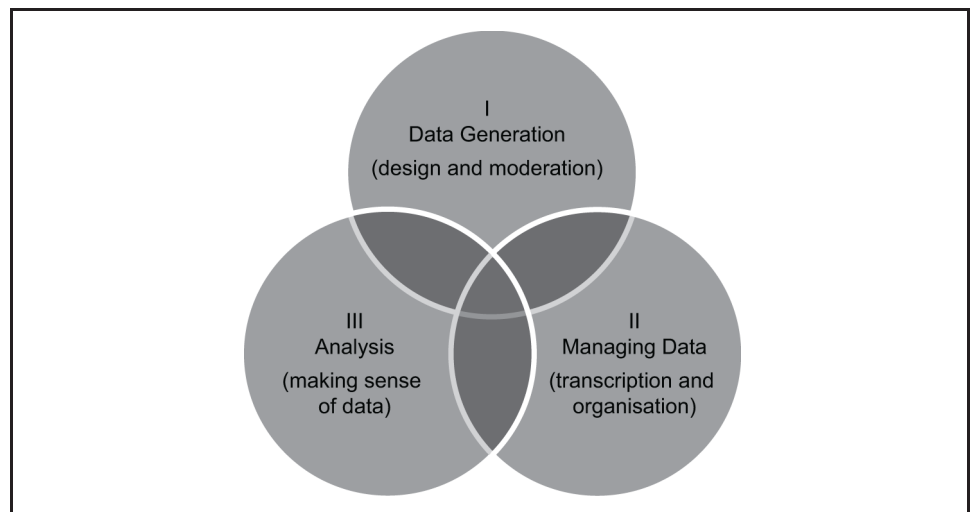
talk-in-interaction, specifically talk generated through the use of the focus group method. These approaches entail an interest in the ''business of talking'', including an interest in what people say, the way they say it and why they say it. Tonkiss (2004, p. 204) argues that, given focus groups ''capture something of the situated communicative processes through which social meanings are made and produced'', focus group data are well suited to discourse or conversation analysis techniques.

While data generation techniques such as interviews or focus groups must be adapted to suit children's physical, social and cognitive needs, the analytical techniques of conversation analysis [CA] and discourse analysis [DA] can be applied to children's talk in the same way that they might be applied to adult talk.

This paper argues for a conceptualisation of the child as a competent social agent who accomplishes specific social ends through talk-in-interaction. Consumer culture and all that it signifies for children is viewed as a social resource, which they can draw on as they engage with one another through talk.

A CA informed discourse analytic approach is utilised to analyse multi-party adult ← → children talk-in-interaction. The approach is broadly informed by the theorisations of a number of researchers including Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), Potter and Wetherell (1987), Edley and Wetherell (1999) Kyratzis (2000, 2004) and Goodwin (2006). CA (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, Sacks, 1992) focuses on people's own interpretation of interaction as revealed in the turn-by-turn unfolding of conversation. CA techniques facilitate the description of the finer details of interaction specifically the ways in which children utilise linguistic repertoires to negotiate meanings and build social selves and relations turn by turn. CA identifies a myriad of specific conversational features including assessment, narrative, agreement or disagreement and silence to name a few. These features can be understood as social actions which build social relations such as alliances, hierarchies, friendships and conflicts. CA is concerned with the intricacies of talk and therefore employs an elaborate transcription system which is designed to preserve the tiny details of speech including the singular utterances, the pauses, the sighs, the inhalations and exhalations, the overlap and the whisper; and it is through this activity that a detailed interpretation is constructed. This is in contrast with most methods of qualitative analysis which ''clean up'' the data in order to make it more readable.

DA critiques the representational view of language and focuses on the performative dimensions of talk in interaction (Woofitt, 2005). The term discourse analysis is used to describe a broad array of approaches to the study of various types of discourse including texts and talk-in-interaction (for a comprehensive introduction to the theoretical and practical dimensions of DA, see Wetherell, *et al.*, 2001a, b). The type of DA used in this paper is concerned with how talk-in-interaction functions in the here and now to construct various and fluid accounts, versions of events and social selves which often alter during the course of the social interaction (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). One of the main analytical concepts drawn on here is the ''interpretative repertoire'', defined as ''recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena'' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 149). Repertoires position people socially hence to speak a repertoire is to speak from a subject position or to build a social self. The term ''linguistic repertoire'' is also used in the literature (Woofitt, 2005, p. 80). The ''repertoire'' concept derives from early DA work by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) who looked at the organisation of phenomena social psychologists have traditionally understood in terms of attitudes, beliefs and attributions. They studied scientific disputes and found that what characterised the scientific accounts and reports they were dealing with was variability both between and within accounts of the same scientists. Woofitt argues that ''sociological approaches which treat discourse as an unproblematic reflection of social or psychological reality are undermined by the assertion that in everyday interaction we produce descriptions which are adequate for the practical purposes at hand'' (Woofitt, 2005, p. 18).

In one of the few treatments of discourse analysis and children's talk, Alldred and Burman (2005) provide a comprehensive discussion on the use of a discourse analytic approach to

children's accounts generated in research settings such as interviews. They argue and I agree that the potential contributions of DA to research with children are no more particular to research with children than with other participants. This, however, is where the merit in the approach lies as both child and adult talk-in-interaction is subjected to the same analytical lens (Alldred and Burman, 2005, p. 177). They emphasise variability in speakers' accounts and locate these variations culturally in contrast to the psychological approach which locates these variations in people's heads (Alldred and Burman, 2005, p. 180). Their approach has a strong Foucauldian flavour which encapsulates a concern with how discourses relate to power, institutions and ideology, issues which are outside the scope of this paper.

The CA informed discourse analytic approach outlined below is comprised of four phases, which, often take place simultaneously as the work of transcription and sample collection can never be entirely divorced from the work of analysis. The overall aim is to provide a textured description and a rich interpretation of multi-party interaction. The presence of an adult researcher in this case myself is considered central to the ''situated activity'' (Goffman, 1961) taking place and my own talk-in-interaction is thus considered as an integral component for analysis.

1. Data corpus is transcribed using CA conventions.

2. Data corpus is carefully scanned and sequences of interaction are selected for detailed analysis.

3. Sequences are analysed using CA and DA to identify specific discursive features including linguistic repertoires along with the positioning and social action being achieved through the employment of these features.

4. Analysis of ''talk as action'' reveals the negotiated sense-making that leads to the construction of selves, relations and things in social context.

All of the extracts below pertain to talk-in-interaction that took place following the introduction of the Coca-Cola logo as part of a bingo game. To this end the logo served to create tangential conversation to the activity at hand i.e. the game itself. ''Coca-Cola'' served to stimulate varying quantities of conversation across the groups[2]. While a CA informed discourse analytic approach does not equate multiple examples with meaningful interpretation, it is fair to say that these extracts have been chosen from a range of possible examples for the purposes of illustration.

Research questions

A number of questions lay behind what was as described above an essentially iterative analysis of the talk generated. In broad terms the research sought to explore what children ''do'' with brand knowledge and preferences in a social context? How do pre-schoolers negotiate meanings around Coca-Cola through talk-in-interaction? To what extent do children use the brand to build social selves and social relations within the group? What wider cultural repertoires are drawn on as children talk about Coca-Cola?

The following analytical discussion is organised into two sections addressing first, construction of product and second, construction of selves and social relations through talk-in-interaction around Coca-Cola. The full sequence of on-topic interaction is included in each example. Schegloff refers to a sequence as a course of action implemented through talk. Sequences of turns ''are not haphazard but have a shape or structure and can be tracked for where they came from, what is being done through them and where they might be going'' (Schegloff, 2007, p. 3). The extracts discussed in this paper are shaped in terms of one play in a game of approximately eight plays each constituting a sequence of talk-in-interaction. The discursive features utilized to do the work of sense-making and consensus building in the illustrations which follow include:

■ assessment strategies;

■ agreement and disagreement with prior speakers;

- self-contradiction; and
- construction of a range of linguistic repertoires (health-based, treat-based, permission-based and age-based).

A guide to transcription conventions is included in Table I. Arrows in the margins guide the reader to specific areas for discussion.

Findings

I – ''The Coke side of life'' – constructing product

Extracts one and two are complete sequences of talk-in-interaction around the topic of Coca-Cola. The children in conversation with me the moderator engage in sense-making

Table I Transcription conventions			
		Symbol	*Meaning*
I – Sequencing		[	A single left bracket indicates the point of overlap onset
		]	A single right bracket indicates the point of at which overlapping stops
		=	Equal signs indicate latching that is there is no interval between the end of a prior and the start of a next part of talk
II – Timed intervals		(0.0)	The number in parentheses indicates the elapsed time in tenths of seconds of a pause in speech
		(.)	A dot in parentheses indicates a very brief pause within or between utterances
		Word	Underscoring indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude
III – Characteristics of speech production		:::	Colons indicate a prolongation of the immediately prior sound. Multiple colons indicate a more prolonged sound
		–	A dash indicates a cut-off of the prior word or sound
		., ? ?, !	Punctuation marks are used to indicate characteristics of speech production; they do not refer to grammatical units
		.	A period indicates a stopping fall in tone
		,	A comma indicates a continuing intonation, the kind of falling-rising contour produced when reading items from a list
		?	A question mark indicates a rising intonation
		!	An *exclamation point* indicates an animated tone
		↓ ↑	Arrows indicate marked shifts into higher or lower pitch in the utterance-part immediately following the arrow
		WORD	Upper case indicates especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk
		°word °	Utterances or utterance parts bracketed by degree signs are relatively quieter than the surrounding talk
		> text <	Right/left carets bracketing an utterance indicate the enclosed speech was delivered more rapidly than usual for the speaker
		< text >	Left/right carets bracketing an utterance indicate the enclosed speech was delivered more slowly than usual for the speaker
		.hhhh	A dot-prefixed row of hs indicates an inbreath. Without the dot they indicate an outbreath
		W(h)ord	A parenthesised h, or row of hs within a word indicates breathiness, as in laughter, crying, etc
IV – Transcribers doubts and comments		()	Empty parentheses indicates the transcribers inability to hear what was said and/or to identify the speaker
		(word)	Parenthesized words indicates dubious hearings or speaker identifications
		(())	Double parentheses contain transcriber's descriptions rather than, or in addition to, transcriptions
		→	Left margin arrows indicate specific parts of an extract discussed in the text

Notes: The glossary of symbols provided above has been adapted from those provided by Psathas (1995) and Ten Have (1999). The majority of these symbols were first developed by Gail Jefferson

activity around the meanings of the brand. While at least one member from every group successfully identified the Coca-Cola logo, negotiation around product identification very occasionally ensued as children related the brand to other products including confectionary products and alcohol products.

Extract one (Figure 2) is taken from a group comprising four participants Cillian, Alan, Michael and Alice. Extract two (Figure 3) is taken from another group comprising four participants Luke, Ewen, Cathy and Anna. Each extract begins with the presentation of the Coca-Cola logo (one play in the ongoing bingo game) along with a request for the identification of this logo. It is recommended that each extract is read through in full prior to reading the analysis that follows.

Both sequences are characterized by an engagement in the work of product evaluation provoked in both cases by myself the moderator (lines 200 and 71). Initial responses to the

Figure 2	Extract one

```
        187  Olivia:   Alice has it. and ↑what is it ↑called (1.0)
        188  Cillian:  E::m a drink
        189  Olivia:   [It's a drink]
        190  Alan:     [Coke]
        191  Michael:  BEER
        192  Cillian:  °Beer°
        193  Olivia:   Is it be↑er
        194  Alan:     Coke (.)
        195  Cillian:  Coke (.)
        196  Michael:  [Coca Cola]
        197  Alice:    [Wine]
        198  Olivia:   You think it's ↑wine (1.0) I think it
        199           is Coca-cola(.) it is Coca-cola I think
  →     200           Alan is right.  and do you ↑like coke
        201  Alan &    [Yeah]
        202  Michael:
  →     203  Cillian:  [  I ]I don't drink coke[(.)cos it's not =
        204  Michael:                       [I dwink (.) I dwink
        205  Cillian:  = good for you.]
        206  Michael:  = eh coca-cola chocolate.]
        207  Olivia:   Oh and ↑why do you not- drink it?
        208           ((to Cillian))
  →     209  Cillian:  'Cos it's not good for me
        210  Olivia:   Is it not. is coke not good for you.
        211  Michael:  °No°
        212  Olivia:   Are you do you drink it Alice
        213  Alice:    ((shakes her head))
        214  Olivia    No (.) Alan?
  →     215  Alan:     Yeah
  →     216  Olivia:   Just some↑times
  →     217  Alan:     (Never) I don't drink it anymore.
        218  Olivia:   You don't drink it anymore.
        219  Michael:  >I do< [(.)]
        220  Olivia:          [you]
  →     221  Michael:  Only at cinemas.
  →     222  Olivia:   Only at ↑cine↓mas so it's a treat is it?
        223  Michael:  Yeah
        224  Olivia:   Are you allowed have it as a treat.
        225  Michael:  Yeah
        226  Olivia:   And the other children were telling me you
        227           sometimes can get it in McDonalds.(1.5) that
        228           ri↑ght
        229  Cillian:  No (.)
        230  Olivia:   >Okay ready<
        231  Alan:     Yeah it is (.)
        232  Olivia:   °>It is<° okay::
```

Figure 3 Extract two

```
        62   Olivia:   < Does anyone > know what < this one is
        63             called.>  (.)
        64   Ewen:     Em:
        65   Anna:     A Ba:ar
        66   Olivia:   A Bar is it?
        67   Cathy:    [No it's COKE ]
        68   Ewen:     [No it's Coca ] Cola
        69   Anna:     Coke
        70   Olivia:   Who's got it (.8) °Cathy you can put it on
→       71             yours° tell me do you like ↑Coke
        72   Ewen:     <I like [coke as well]>
        73   Cathy:           [   I      ]I:: DO like coke (.)
        74   Anna:     I don't like Coke   [(em em)]
        75   Luke:                         [EM MY  ] MAMMY GAVE ME
        76             COKE (.) I =
→       77   Anna:     It makes me sick. ((points to throat))
→       78   Luke:     =I I ( ) take it
→       79   Cathy:    I think it makes me sick
→       80   Ewen:     I ↑think it makes you mad
        81   Olivia:   It makes you ma:d? does [ it?]
        82   Ewen:                            [yeah]
        83   Cathy:    [°It makes you ( ) ]
→       84   Luke:     [IT MAKES ME      ]  MAD TOO
        85   Olivia:   And do you ↑like [the ↑taste of it?]
        86   Ewen:                      [Eh It makes you  ] ((to
        87             Luke)) Eh when I taste it it makes me mad it
→       88             makes me punch (.) my brother.
        89   Olivia:   ↑Oh ↓my goodness (2.0) wow! (.) and do you
        90             take it ↑some↓times?
→       91   Ewen:     Yeah I just take it wo- one time.
→       92   Olivia:   Is it for a treat?
        93   Ewen:     No
        94   Olivia:   Where? do you get coke
        95   Ewen:     Em (2.5)
        96   Cathy:    (... ) ((to Anna))
        97   Ewen:     In the (.) in the sweet shop
        98   Anna:     (...) ((to Cathy))
        99   Olivia:   OKAY (.) are we ready for the next one
                       >ready for the next one <
```

product are positive but disagreement between speakers almost immediately ensues. Cillian disagrees with Michael and Alan's positive evaluation (line 203) and accounts for his own negative evaluation on health grounds (line 209) thus initiating the construction of a health-based linguistic repertoire. In response to this Alan contradicts his initial claimed consumption stating he ''never'' drinks it (lines 215 and 217) and Michael accounts for his consumption as being limited to cinema visits (line 221).

Similarly, in the second sequence Anna creates opposition stating that she does not like ''Coke'' on the basis that it makes her sick (line 77). The health-based linguistic repertoire is elaborated on in this lively sequence of talk around the effects of the product on behaviour. Cathy aligns herself with Anna through repetition of Anna's turn (line 79) and Ewen provides a variation on the same theme stating he thinks it makes people mad (line 80). Luke aligns with Ewen stating it makes him mad too (line 84). A failed attempt at shifting topic back to taste evaluation provokes further elaboration on the theme of madness by Ewen, this time incorporating a violent dimension to Coke consumption into the broader repertoire (line 88).

My own adult role in both sequences of interaction is by no means inconsequential to the direction in which the talk progresses. While Cillian initiates construction of a health-based repertoire around Coke, I draw on this repertoire in the interactions which follow. I contribute to the downplaying of claimed consumption of the product on the parts of both Michael and

Alan (lines 216 and 222) and by the end of the first sequence a consensus is achieved which sees Coca-Cola constructed as a product which is ''bad'' for us but which we occasionally consume. This reinforcement of the health-based repertoire by me is more subtly illustrated in the second sequence. Luke uses the verb ''take'' with reference to Coca-Cola (line 78) a term more usually associated with medical products. My talk ties in with Luke's with a repeat on his ''take'' in relation to coca-cola (line 90) and this occurs in turn by Ewen (line 91). This description of ''taking'' Coca-Cola contributes to the construction of the health-based repertoire. An alternative treat-based linguistic repertoire is also introduced by me[3] for the discussion of Coke in both sequences (lines 222 and 92).

II – ''The Coke side of life'' – constructing selves and social relations

A focus on how linguistic repertoires function for speakers provides an insight into the variety of selves being constructed from this cultural resource. As the child constructs or co-constructs a repertoire they are building social position and ultimately social selves. In parallel to this speakers are also engaged in building social relations and this is evidenced through collaboration, conflict and games of distinction in talk. The following two extracts have been selected to illustrate utilization of Coca-Cola as a resource with which to engage in the activity of building selves and social relations. Extract three (Figure 4) is taken from a group comprising three participants Carly, Clio and Emma.

In this extract the children co-construct permission-based and age-based linguistic repertoires. To revert momentarily to the construction of product, Coca-Cola is constructed as an age-appropriate product by Carly (line 24). As regards social selves, utilization of this repertoire serves to position oneself as ''old'' enough to consume Coca-Cola and in the same vein to construct the product as something that younger children or babies might aspire to consume one day. Clio aged two and a half is the youngest participant in this group and the slowest in responding to the presentation of the Coca-Cola logo, eventually responding with a statement of recognition (line 20). Carly uses Coca-Cola to construct herself as ''big'' in opposition to Clio who she claims is ''too small'' to drink Coke (lines 24, 29). She also draws on a permission based repertoire when she states that her mother allows her to have Coke (line 34). Emma links consumption of Coca-Cola with good behaviour (line

Figure 4 Extract three

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        14    Olivia:   There you ↑go (.) now what's this one
        15              >anyone know?<
        16    Carly:    .hhh Coca-Cola
        17    Emma:     Coke (.) °coke°
        18    Carly:    Co-ca-Co-la
        19    Olivia:   And do you like that?
→       20    Clio:     Coke (.)
        21    Carly:         [yeah ] ((nods))
        22    Clio:          [coke ]
→       23    Carly:    Clio (.) you're not gettin' cloke that's
        24              why(.) coke that's why you're too small for
        25              coke. ((points to Clio as she is speaking))
        26    Olivia:   ↑Is she?
        27    Carly:    ((Nods))
        28    Olivia:   And what? about yo↓u
→       29    Carly:    >I'm big<
        30    Olivia:   And what about? you Kate
→       31    Emma:     Em (.) hh. < I'm a good girl for gettin'
        32              coke.>
→       33    Carly:    And I'm a good girl for gettin' coke as
→       34              ↑well .hhh yeah (.) me mam always let me
        35              have some coke.
        36    Olivia:   Is it good ↑for you
        37    Carly:    Yeah
        38    Olivia:   >Yeah< okay (.) we'll move on to the next
        39              ↓one are you ready? for the next one
```

31) and this is reiterated by Carly (line 33). They thus use the resource to build ''mature'' and ''well-behaved'' selves in receipt of a sophisticated aspirational product.

The preceding sequences have been characterised by the co-construction of a consensus between participants. Talk-in-interaction is mainly collaborative and meanings around Coca-Cola are negotiated through the various repertoires outlined. However, it was common for the talk-in-interaction to take on a dyadic or triadic form at times whereby individual participants or groups of two or three would work in opposition against other members of the group. The final extract (Figure 5) is taken from a group comprising four children, two girls Carol and Abbie and two boys Ciaran and Dali.

Coca-Cola does not promote a great quantity of talk among this particular group of children and the interaction is characterised by non-elaborated positive evaluative statements and gestures about the product from Ciaran (lines 178,180) and from Carol (line 182). Dali's stated opposition to the product on the basis of its ''bubbly'' attributes (line 171) sees him outnumbered and his search for support from Abbie for his position is unsuccessful (line 183). Abbie remains silent throughout this sequence of interaction and by refusing to engage in the standard QA (question-answer) response mechanism thus ostracises Dali, leaving him somewhat outside the group and alone in his anti-Coke stance. She achieves this without actually revealing her own preferences. He remains resolute with regards to his own stated preference (line 186) and consensus on product evaluation is thus not achieved in this particular sequence of interaction. Both Dali and Abbie succeed in constructing ''independent'' selves albeit in different ways. Abbie, through her deliberate silence and refusal to respond to Dali's non-verbal quest for support (line 186) appears empowered in the interaction. Dali is positioned outside the group as he receives little acknowledgement and no agreement with his account from other members of the group including me.

Figure 5	Extract four

```
        162  Carol:    Me
        163  Olivia:   .hhh (2.0) ↑Carol has it (.) and what's?
        164            this one called.
        165  Ciaran:   Co[ca- ]Cola
        166  Dali:        [COKE]
        167  Carol:    [I need (.) I need one more]((bingo card))
        168  Olivia:   [°Very go:::od° and does   ] anybody drink?
        169            Coca-Cola?
        170  Ciaran:   ((raises hand))
   →    171  Dali:     <I don't ↑like it> 'cos there's (.) bubbles
        172            in it.
        173  Olivia:   [>Really?<] =
        174  Carol:    [But this ]is always falling[off ?]((name
        175            badge))
        176  Olivia:                          [Ciaran] do
        177            ya'
   →    178  Ciaran:   I drink it
        179  Olivia:   An- do you like? it
   →    180  Ciaran:   ((nods))
        181  Olivia:   Anybody else?
   →    182  Carol:    I like it [But this is falling off]
   →    183  Dali:             [°You don't like it do? You.°]
        184            ((to Abbie))
        185  Olivia:   °Oh let me fix it for you° ((to Carol))
   →    186  Dali:     I don't like it((looks towards Abbie again))
        187  Olivia:   Now >if you don't touch it again it won't
        188            fall off<
        189  Ciaran:   .hh .hh .hh ((stretches over to Carol's
        190            temporarily vacant space and takes toy
        191            lion))
        192  Olivia:   Okay::: are you ready for (.) lets ↑see
        193            >who's gonna ↑win< (2.0)°who has this one?°
```

Discussion

The talk-in-interaction discussed in all of the extracts above was tangential to the main activity in progress i.e. a game of bingo. My intention was to generate and capture incidental talk around commercial products as we worked through activities that contained branded stimulus material. My analytical focus lies with how children construct knowledge and critical evaluations around commercial products and thus employ them as social resources in the course of talk-in-interaction. The children were engaged in the play-based activities at hand, and thus, were more relaxed in the talk-in-interaction which predictably occurred with the introduction of branded stimulus material, than they might have been in a more conventional focus group setting where the activity at hand is the garnering of ''attitudes'', ''beliefs'' and ''opinions''.

Identification of the discursive features evidenced turn-by-turn revealed the use of assessment to conduct product evaluation usually followed quickly by agreement or disagreement from next speakers leading eventually to a negotiated consensus or dissonance around product meanings. Identification of linguistic repertoires reveals the broader cultural themes the children draw on as they make sense of the product. The health-based repertoire is employed by pre-schoolers to position themselves as sensible and perhaps health conscious. They evoke occasions of ''illness'' and ''hyperactivity'' following consumption of the product to reinforce this theme. The permission-based repertoire is used to construct Coca-Cola as something which is either allowed or forbidden by parents and an occasion-based product consumed for example as a treat, at the cinema or at McDonalds. Finally the age-based repertoire is closely related to ideas around permission. Claimed consumption of the product allows the children to build ''age-based'' selves. ''Big'' boys or girls can drink Coca-Cola but it is not suitable for ''babies''.

Conclusion

As expected Coca-Cola is widely recognised by pre-schoolers and an ability and interest in evaluating and discussing the product was demonstrated. Levels of claimed direct experience with the product varied among the children with some demonstrating confusion as to what exactly the product is while others claimed expertise around it. No advertisements or jingles for the product were evoked and I would tentatively suggest that the children's main experiences around the product have been through parents or other adults. The children draw mainly on health and permission based repertoires in their negotiation of the brand constructing it as something which is ''bad'' and has the potential to make one ''mad'', while simultaneously constructing themselves as sensible and health-conscious. My talk serves to reinforce these ideas as I draw on similar repertoires and reinforce the children's positions thus constructing myself as the ''sensible'' and ''ethical'' researcher who is not going to challenge these negative brand connotations around a sugar-laden drink for the sake of research!

The fact that an adult researcher was present and participant in the talk-in-interaction coupled with the ''healthy eating policy'' governing children's lunch boxes that was implemented in the majority of the preschools in which this research was conducted may have influenced the specific repertoires constructed within these focus groups[4]. However, these factors only serve to emphasise the social nature of talk around brands and the critical abilities children as young as three and four demonstrate in their negotiation of brand meanings and subsequent construction of selves around a global giant in this case Coca-Cola.

Ritson and Elliott (1999) argue that value-laden information surrounding consumer artefacts has become a cultural resource in itself. This paper supports the idea that knowledge around consumer artefacts has social uses but it also argues that this knowledge is co-constructed in specific social contexts and that meanings constructed around consumer artefacts are malleable. The findings outlined above also support Langer and Farrar's (2003) argument that children are agentive in utilizing the materials of consumer culture for the construction of local selves located in peer groups.

In conclusion, the research presented here demonstrates the possibilities for direct engagement between consumer researchers and pre-schoolers. Data generation techniques such as activity-based focus groups that are tailored to the social, cognitive and emotional needs of this age group combined with an analytical framework that prioritises the performative dimensions of children's talk-in-interaction reveal the general social competences of pre-schoolers. A CA informed discourse analytic approach reveals specifically the creative and critical manner in which pre-schoolers utilise a global consumer artefact such as Coca-Cola as a conversational resource with which to build product-related meanings and local social selves. This paper, thus, suggests that the preschool consumer can be engaged with as a social ''being'' rather than as a social ''becoming'' and that a meaningful dialogue can be created between preschool consumers and researchers given the appropriate data generation and analytical tools.

Notes

1. Pre-schooler is broadly defined as including children aged two to five years.

2. The author would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the fact that the logic of branding is embedded in the everyday encounters of the child participants as a result of the methodological encounter itself which is structured to elicit conversation about products and brand. It is not the author's intention to suggest that the talk-in-interaction around brands is produced spontaneously, however, it is tangential to the task at hand i.e. a competitive activity and therefore talk emerges as incidental rather than as directly elicited as might be the case in a more traditional focus group setting.

3. The CA-informed discourse analytic approach sees the analyst acknowledge and highlight occurrences such as this one when the emergent repertoire, in this case, a treat-based repertoire is introduced by the moderator. This should not detract from the analytical point that the children are co-constructors of this particular repertoire, but rather, illustrate the significance of analysing all the interaction taking place not just the words of the participants.

4. Information on the healthy eating policy now implemented in many preschools was acquired anecdotally through informal conversations with the early learning educators in the establishments in which the research was conducted. Empirical research did not extend outside the generation of talk through focus groups. A Foucauldian approach would attempt to connect public policy discourse with local discourse and while this may be an interesting focus for future research it is beyond the remit of this paper.

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