

# **Verbal Discrimination**

## **A New Chapter in the Social Psychology of Aggression**

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A New Chapter in the Social Psychology of Aggression\*

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## VERBAL DISCRIMINATION

A NEW CHAPTER IN THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF AGGRESSION<sup>1</sup>

CARL F. GRAUMANN

## AGGRESSION, DISCRIMINATION, AND WORDS THAT HURT

The title of this paper implies both a thesis and a critique. The thesis is that verbal discrimination, i.e., social discrimination by means of language, is a case of aggression. The implicit critique is that the social psychology of aggression has so far largely failed to account for the variety and the specifics of verbal aggression. In other words, I shall try to bring together and to integrate three fields of research that presently exist side by side with considerable mutual disregard or even ignorance: There is, first and oldest of all, the large and diversified field of research on *aggression* with a host of competing and partly incompatible theories. The impression of heterogeneity that this field offers to an observer is partly due to the fact that all major disciplines of psychology have their share and claim in this field: the general experimental psychology of learning, emotion and motivation, the differential and/or personality psychology of aggressiveness, developmental and educational approaches; furthermore, not just related, but deeply engrained in quite a few psychological theories: biological, ethological and, last, not least, psychoanalytical notions of aggression. Also social psychology has its share. But if we look up the obligatory chapter on aggression in textbooks of social psychology the greater part

of it is a citation and rephrasing of the above-mentioned approaches. If we leave damage to property and other objects (and, perhaps, cruelty to animals) aside, the fact that human aggression is an intrinsically social affair, has, for a long time, been taken for granted. That aggression, be it initial or respondent, provoking or provoked, retaliatory behaviour, is best understood and analysed as a case of interpersonal or intergroup *interaction* has only recently begun to be realised (cf. Mummendey, 1984).

The potential of an interactionist conception of aggression for the topic of verbal discrimination will have to be discussed in some detail. But before we go into this it has to be mentioned that social discrimination is not much of a topic in the literature on aggression; there is hardly any reference to it. Nor is there anything noticeable on verbal aggression in standard textbook chapters on aggression - in spite of the fact that as early as 1961 A.H.Buss included verbal aggression in his then widely read monograph, listing at least its two major forms of rejection and threat. Ignoring the 'behaviourese' of Buss's text ("verbal aggression is defined as a vocal response that delivers noxious stimuli to another organism", 1961, p.6), one may summarise that in *rejection* a victim is labeled as aversive, bad, and unwanted, while verbal *threat* is defined "as a response that symbolises, substitutes for, or is anticipatory of a subsequent attack" [p.7). It must be added, however, that this was written without any reference to the social-interactional character of aggression nor to its discriminatory variant.

If, in turn, we focus on *discrimination*, we very soon find that it is not a research topic of its own in social psychology. Why this

is so, will be discussed in this chapter. When, in monographs or articles on prejudice and stereotyping, discrimination is mentioned, it is not associated with aggression. Nor have researchers in the field of intergroup relations and behaviour taken notice of the fact that a large part of this behaviour is verbal, either ingroup talk about outgroups, or talk about ingroup-outgroup relations, or discourse across the border between ingroup and outgroup. This, however, is the main field for the occurrence of verbal discrimination and a growing research field for socio- and pragmalinguists some of whom lean heavily on cognitive social psychology (cf. van Dijk, 1984; 1987). It has also been students of communication and of discourse who have documented "that talk and text not only may hurt you, they also may hurt you more effectively, more systematically, and more permanently" (than "sticks and stones") (Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk, 1988, 11). But so far the words by means of which we hurt others have not become a research topic of either language or social psychology.

So much for a brief introductory status report on the disconnectedness of three fields of research, aggression, discrimination, and discourse, which, however, need connecting if the research interest is discriminatory intergroup talk.

#### AGGRESSION FROM A SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Returning next to the social psychology of aggression, there is, first of all, the nasty little question of how social it is. We need not reiterate the periodically recurrent issue of how social social psychology is in general. But there are several usages of "social" some of which seem to be important for a proper

understanding of aggression. One usage refers to the *interpersonal* dimension that, ultimately, requires an interactional conception. As Mummendey and others (Mummendey, 1984) have been able to show the question of whether a given act is experienced as aggressive depends on its temporal position in a sequence of acts, i.e., within an ongoing social interaction. This, in turn, entails that one and the same behaviour can be and usually will be interpreted differently by the interactants. Whoever feels that he or she *reacts* tends to see the other person's behaviour as aggressive, and there seems to be a general tendency to see oneself as reactor rather than initiator in conflicts and contentions.

This tendency to see the other one rather than oneself as the aggressor or perpetrator is endorsed, at least in our society, by norms that enjoin compassion and prohibit doing harm to fellow humans. Aggression, however, is defined and generally understood as intentionally doing harm to another person. Hence, whoever feels like injuring or offending another person, will try to legitimise or justify this behaviour, for instance, by defining it as retaliation or as a punishment that the opponent deserves to get, etc.

All this endorses Mummendey's conception that aggression is both a *perspectival* and an *interpretive* term. The "social construction of aggression" depends on the perspective and the interpretation of the respective interactant. The same has been demonstrated repeatedly by Mikula (1993) for the experience of injustice and by Baumeister et al. (1990) for anger reactions; both prove to be functions of either perpetrators' or victims' perspectives. In such cases of conflict or contention we expect the interactants'

perspectives to diverge and, consequently, their accounts and subsequent behaviours to be at variance. The manifestation in language of divergent perspectives on social episodes has experimentally been demonstrated by Graumann (1989; 1990; 1992; cf. Graumann & Sommer, 1988).

The conclusion to be drawn from the perspectival and interpretive character of annoying and aggressive interactions is that *language* is involved and should be accounted for in two respects:

(1) The common interpretation of an adversary's behaviour as aggressive and unjust, of one's own as defensive and justified, will hardly, if ever remain silent. On the contrary, it is important that everybody concerned hears that I was attacked, offended, snubbed, cheated - whatever the world accepts as acts of aggression or violation of one's rights. It is part of the game that the adversary (over)hears that his or her behaviour was mean, brutish, rude, ruthless, hurtful, illegal - whatever is commonly considered to be offensive and socially unacceptable conduct. The accused adversary will, in turn, proclaim that the incriminated act, far from being aggressive and unjust, was normal, civilised, adequate, at any rate, justified under the circumstances. All this has to be stated and argued in words, i.e., in verbal accounts and counter-accounts.

(2) Not only the interpretation of the respective parts of an aggressive interaction will be given in so many words and arguments. *Aggression itself is largely performed or enacted in words*. After all, we are neither living in a thrashing and beating culture, nor will its members behave like some experimental psychologists, hurting their subjects with electric shocks. The recent "ethnic cleansing" in former Yugoslavia notwithstanding,

most of the everyday conflicts between competing and rivalling individuals and between social, political, religious and ethnic groups that make up modern society are, at least in their early stages, carried out verbally, attacking opponent outgroups and their representatives in words for their (allegedly) harmful, if not pernicious, policy, program, or conduct.

The language in which this is done is frequently aggressive to the letter, namely intentionally trying to harm the adversary, be it cause or person, an individual member or a group or social category as a whole. And, usually, aggressive discourse goes hand in hand with other aggressive activities provoking them, justifying the use of force, instigating others to use force, and, last not least, evoking the adversary to turn violent so that one's own use of force can evidently be understood and accounted for as defensive. Above all, *speaking itself is acting*. Speaking we do not merely express and communicate meanings; we do things with words (Austin, 1975), and even the law has acknowledged that we can hurt with words as well as with pictures, Catherine MacKinnon (1993) has convincingly argued that social inequality, a common breeding-ground for heterophobia and social discriminations, is "substantially created and enforced - that is, *done* - through words and images...A sign *saying* "Whites Only" is only words, but it is not legally seen as expressing the viewpoint "we do not want Black people in this store"...It is seen as the act of segregation that it is, like "Juden nicht erwünscht" (p. 13).

In the social psychology of aggression the use of language as a weapon has found little research interest. While justificatory and apologetic language has usually been registered and content-



analyzed in studies of aggressive interaction, if and when subjects were asked about motives or reasons for inimical behaviour, aggressive verbal behaviour has remained restricted to name-calling and related uses of abusive language.

Among the few social psychologists who - after the early field experiments by Sherif & Sherif (1953) - have explicitly studied *intergroup aggression* are Shalom Schwartz and Naomi Struch (Schwartz & Struch, 1989; Struch & Schwartz, 1989). As is the case with most studies of intergroup relationships their research interest is not in the language of intergroup aggression, but in Tajfel's (and ever since) favourite question of whether and how ingroup favouritism is related to socially more "disruptive" forms of outgroup bias. Schwartz and Struch cogently argue that overt aggression, at least within a given society, is bound to be limited: "Harming another society member intentionally, even a member of an outgroup, entails violating widely held internalised and social norms that enjoin compassion and oppose cruelty to other human beings" (Struch & Schwartz, 1989, p. 365). There are, however, two conditions under which the socially desirable inhibition of overt aggression is abolished. One is the perception of a conflict that seemingly justifies destructive action against those with whom we are in conflict. The other condition is also "in the eye of the beholder"; it is what Schwartz & Struch (1989) call the *dehumanization* of an outgroup whose members are denied truly human characteristics, who, at least, are considered to be less human than members of the ingroup. The consequence of this differential valuation is: "The more one dehumanises the outgroup, the less they deserve the human treatment enjoined by universal norms, and hence the greater the aggression" (1989, p. 365).

Similarly, Daniel Bar-Tal (1989; 1990) has characterised what he calls "the extreme case of stereotyping and prejudice" as "*delegitimization*". By means of an extremely negative characterization a delegitimised group is placed "outside the boundaries of the commonly accepted groups" (1989, p. 171). As a consequence, such groups do not deserve human treatment.

The essential point, common to both "dehumanization" and "delegitimization", is an ultimately *moral discrimination* between ingroups and certain outgroups. This kind of separation has properly been termed "*moral exclusion*" by Staub (1989; 1990), Opatow (1990), and Deutsch (1990). Taking an ingroup as a "moral community" for whose members "moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness" apply (Opatow, 1990, p.3), we may consider those individuals and groups for whom these conditions do not apply as "morally excluded". Excluding others from one's own moral community means that those others are perceived "as psychologically distant..., as expendable and undeserving" (p.2). With respect to those whom members of a given group perceive as existing outside the "scope of justice" that Deutsch (1985; 1990) defines as the psychological boundary of one's moral community, ingroup members lack moral obligations. The morally excluded are therefore "eligible for harm" (Opatow, 1990, p.13). What the authors of moral exclusions do not explicitly state and study is the fact that it is primarily and sometimes exclusively by *moral discourse* that we separate from and exclude others.

The conceptions of moral exclusion, dehumanization, and delegitimization may serve as a conceptual bridge to understanding social discrimination.

## SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION AS AGGRESSION

The concept of discrimination as it is, almost consensually, used in social science has not been developed in social psychology, nor is it integrated in any noteworthy psychological theory. Tajfel's and his followers' term of "outgroup discrimination" in most cases means *differentiation* from an outgroup, mainly as compared with ingroup favouritism (Tajfel, 1970, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1985; cf., however, Mummendey, 1995; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983). Only rarely, preferably in conflict situations, this differentiation from the outgroup turns into aggressive forms of social discrimination, i.e., behaviour intended to hurt outgroup members (Struch & Schwartz, 1989; Opatow, 1990).

This, however, is the basic meaning of social discrimination, as it was originally introduced into social psychology: *treating others to their disadvantage on a categorical basis*, i.e., in terms of their (attributed) group or category membership which implies the disregard of their individual properties or merits (Williams, 1947; G.W.Allport, 1954; Simpson & Yinger, 1965). A discriminated person is treated as a (typical) woman, as a (typical) Jew, as coloured, as a homosexual, i.e., as an instance or typical specimen of a social category (Graumann, 1995; Graumann & Wintermantel, 1989). In other words, each person whom a discriminator perceives or suspects to be a member of a resented outgroup or category will be treated in the same discriminatory way. This interchangeability of outgroup members must not be confused with the construct of homogeneity as it is used and controversially discussed in social psychology. Homogeneity as the term for the perceived similarity of (or the reluctance to

differentiate between) group members is not restricted to outgroups (Simon, 1992).

Among those social categories against whose members discrimination is an almost ubiquitous, but certainly quotidian occurrence, the major ones are race, class, gender, age, ethnic or national origin, religious or professional affiliation. To be sure, differential categorical treatment may be positive (such as philosemitism) or negative (such as antisemitism), and, consequently, may have benign or detrimental effects. But social scientists have mainly been interested in studying the various disadvantaging techniques of discrimination; and rightly so, since it is by means of these strategies and techniques that social *injustice* and *inequity* are established, maintained, enforced, and reproduced. It is only with respect to the negative or detrimental kinds of discrimination that the thesis of this paper is maintained, namely, that verbal discrimination is a case of aggression. The causal connection between social discrimination, inequality and injustice endorses the quasi-juridical conception of discrimination as the denial of equal rights, basically of what we have come to recognise as human rights.

For a social psychologist, inequality or injustice of treatment is not restricted to what is protected by law and, hence, actionable. It is, as Mikula (1993, p. 228) states, any "inconsiderate, impolite or aggressive conduct" and refers to "any treatment which violates a person's dignity". However, it is discriminating only if it is done *on categorical grounds*, not on an individual or personal basis. Hence, all social discrimination is unjust treatment, but the latter is discriminatory only if it concerns a

person as a member of a social category or group, or, in the words of Dovidio et al. (1996, 279), if it is "a selectively *unjustified* negative behaviour toward members of the target group".

If the categorical treatment of a person amounts to the denial of privileges or rights that are willingly accorded to other members of the society, mainly to members of one's own group, then it hardly needs adding that the person discriminated against is motivated to avoid such treatment, resents it and usually develops hostile feelings against the discriminating agent, individual or group. As we may infer from the study of aggression in general the discriminator will not necessarily interpret his or her behaviour as discriminatory: The other one gets only what members of such groups deserve, inferior as they are, of lower class, lower intelligence, lower morality, less humanity. But the discriminator is also quick in recognizing the discriminated person's reaction as inappropriate, impudent, presumptuous, but certainly as "typical" (i.e., for a member of that group) and not to be tolerated.

In parentheses a brief reference to the conception of *tolerance* may be permitted. If tolerance may be defined as the ability to acknowledge and the willingness to cope with views and ways of life different from one's own, then we may conceive of social discrimination as a prototypical manifestation of *intolerance*. Accordingly, we occasionally find tolerance defined as the lack of intergroup prejudice and discrimination, as the "willingness to evaluate individuals as individuals" (Martin, 1964, p.11). Furthermore, tolerance/intolerance are as much perspectival and interpretive terms as are aggression and discrimination. Take the

case of fundamentalism: While from a liberal's perspective tolerance may be the ability and the readiness to appreciate alternative beliefs and ways of life, for a fundamentalist such indulgence of dissenting, heretic views is a weakness, if not a traitorous lack of faith, hence, a conduct to be prosecuted and punished. What for a liberal mind is a democratic virtue, for a guardian of the purity of faith is an irresponsible sin (Graumann, 1996).

When a few years ago Margret Wintermantel and this author got interested in the *social psychology of verbal discrimination* (Graumann & Wintermantel, 1989) we had little to start from. If discrimination was referred to at all in social psychological texts, it was usually in the context of stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination, usually in that order, meaning that discrimination is a potential consequence of stereotyping and prejudice (Stroebe & Insko, 1989; Dovidio et al., 1996), but the history of the attitude-behaviour relationship has made social psychologists wary of relating the latter with the former. Hence, when we consulted standard textbooks of social psychology we found a lot about stereotyping, somewhat less about prejudice, and least, if anything at all, about discrimination, nothing, of course, about verbal discrimination.

In that situation we decided to develop a working model of social discrimination that would help us to study also its linguistic manifestation. Leaning on the general conception of social discrimination as the negative treatment of others on a categorical basis, we first asked ourselves what the *social meaning, use, or function* of discriminatory behaviour may be. Our

preliminary answer was that in discriminating against others individuals mean to do three things:

- (1) They draw a line of separation between themselves and others, who
- (2) are treated as (typical) members of an outgroup or as instances of a social category
- (3) in a depreciatory-derogatory manner.

In other words, discriminating against others means separating from them, typifying and debasing them.

If we take a closer look at these three functions of social discrimination their social psychological significance will become evident:

ad (1) The basic function is that of *separating*, of drawing a line of distinction or division between oneself or one's own group and a given outgroup. Whether self/other or ingroup/outgroup is the more elementary distinction may be difficult to decide, but social differentiation is a necessary, though not sufficient criterion of discrimination. For there are certain others and certain outgroups with respect to whom we tend to stress whatever distinguishes us from them. We do not only draw a line of distinction, as we do in any social categorization, we put a *distance* between "them there" and "us here". Yet there are degrees of distancing, as may be taken from the original Social Distance Scale (Bogardus, 1925): Foreigners, for instance, may be permitted to visit our country, but they are not eligible for permanent residence or citizenship, or, should even be excluded from our country.

Degrees of distancing may also be seen in Allport's (1954) continuum of discriminatory behaviours, ranging from antilocution, through avoidance, active exclusion, physical attacks to

extermination - practically the whole range of xenophobia, racism and kindred forms of ethnocentrism that we have witnessed in this century.

With respect to the discrimination of women Bernice Lott (1993, 97) has developed a model of sexist responses or of "distancing from women" (Lott, 1995) that ranges from humor through putdowns, pornography, institutional exclusion, personal distancing, insult, harassment, intimidation, sexual coercion, sexual and physical abuse to murder.

The processes or activities of separating and distancing (from) others do not necessarily presuppose, but certainly imply, comparison between "them" and "us". It is here that *accentuation* comes in; carefully phrased, a tendency to accentuate differences between and similarities within classes, categories, or groups (Tajfel, 1981; cf. Eiser & Stroebe, 1972). Since Tajfel, who introduced accentuation as a cognitive term and who also suggested that accentuation is magnified by the value relevance of the classification to the subject (Tajfel, 1959, 20), enough evidence has been gathered to conclude that in intergroup discrimination the separating function tends to be accentuated.

ad (2) The following function, the *debasing/degrading* of others is the essentially evaluative, and ultimately moral, component of our concept of discrimination. It is the process by which the *inferiority* of the discriminated outgroup or category is established or reinforced - not just the superiority of the ingroup, which may be established without explicitly degrading others.

While outgroup inferiority is seen or suspected in different facets, such as efficiency, diligence, cleanliness, honesty,



taste, or manners, the fact that outgroup habits and mores are judged as lower in standard than one's own (group's) renders such discriminatory judgments basically *moral judgments*. Perceiving others as "different" is rarely, if ever, value-free. Stated in more general terms "Thought and speech concerning in-groups and out-groups are rarely evaluatively neutral" (Perdue et al., 1990, 482). What has above been referred to as "dehumanization", "delegitimization", and "moral exclusion" are only the extreme variants of such moral judgments. Some of the many ways and means of "devaluing" others will be discussed in the context of verbal discrimination.

ad (3) The last social function that we considered to be essential for discrimination we have labelled *fixation*, in the sense of rendering something constant. Members of outgroups are not only imputed distinctive inferior features. These are ascribed and secured as (more or less) permanent *dispositions*. This fixating function may be realised in either of two socially significant forms: (a) by the attribution of distinguishing and enduring *traits* to another person, (b) by the allocation of a person to a relatively invariable *type*. If it is a cluster of traits we speak of a *stereotype*; the ascription of such clusters to an individual or a group is called *stereotyping*. The use of stereotypes in judging and dealing with others is not restricted to the ascription of traits. But even when it is another person's behaviour patterns, values, or attitudes that a prejudiced individual has in mind, he or she expects these characteristics to be (reliably) true of the social group to which the other person belongs.

Since it is by (perceived) membership that a person is attributed a given set of shared traits, membership amounts to typicality. The "psycho-logic" of social discrimination asserts: Since X is a member of group or category A, he or she will display the characteristics a, b, c that are (proto-)typical for A, or, conversely, if X displays a, b, c, then X will belong to A. If, for instance, anti-Semites believe that being "a Jew" goes together with being money-minded, pushy, and clannish, then the type ("Jew") will imply these traits. Conversely, the mere mention of these traits will mean to anti-Semites that a "Jew" is talked about.

When social discrimination is defined as the derogatory treatment of others "on categorical grounds", then this categoricalness is achieved by fixation: by typing or by stereotyping others. The economy of such fixation 'for once and for all' is evident: Once typed or stereotyped we 'know' who somebody is and how to treat him or her: women are women, Jews will be Jews (Graumann, 1995, 71). The issues of variation in typicality and of whether outgroup membership is fixated in terms of prototype rather than exemplar models has been studied by Mullen & Johnson (1993; 1995)

So much about the functions of social discrimination. They were neither meant to be mutually independent dimensions, nor was the list expected to be exhaustive. It was a merely heuristic conceptual model from which, considering the lack of theory, research on social discrimination by means of language could be started.

## VERBAL DISCRIMINATION AND AGGRESSION

From what has been proposed so far it should have become evident that from our perspective the use of language is an essential human way of coping with the world, be it the physical, the social, or the intellectual environment. That is why we maintain quite generally that the use of language in everyday orientation and communication should be of central interest to social psychology. Unfortunately, this view is shared by only a small (but growing) number of social psychologists (Maass & Arcuri, 1992; 1996; Semin & Fiedler, 1991). Still in 1995 Semin complains: "Attempts to interface language and social cognition have been sporadic and unsystematic, despite the centrality of language for social psychology in general and social cognition in particular" (Semin, 1995, p. 183).

Similarly, in a recent review on language and stereotyping, Maass & Arcuri (1996, 193) criticise that "despite the central role of language in stereotype transmission and maintenance, social psychologists have paid relatively little attention to this issue until recently". It is the great merit of Maass & Arcuri's paper to identify and discuss four different functions that language may fulfill in intergroup relations, viz., stereotype transmission, cognitive organization, stereotype maintenance, and the expression of stereotypic identities. But, their topic being stereotypes and stereotyping from the perspective of their "linguistic intergroup bias model" (Maass et al., 1989), they focus on language abstractness rather than on real intergroup discriminatory speech. Consequently, one important intergroup function of language is neglected, namely, how social discrimination is *performed* (or

enacted) in discriminatory speech acts (Graumann & Wintermantel, 1989; MacKinnon, 1993; Graumann, 1995). One has the impression that *speaking as acting* tends to be generally neglected in a predominantly cognitivist social psychology.

Convinced that the language which people use in their everyday social setting reflects and frequently realises what they intend (think of, wish for - the whole gamut of cognitive processes), we planned to look for correspondences between the social functions and the potential linguistic manifestations of discrimination. It was no problem to find linguistic manifestations of separation and distancing, of negative evaluation, and of the typing and stereotyping modes of fixation (Graumann & Wintermantel, 1989). But exemplification is not enough. For a valid demonstration of how social discrimination and aggression is done by means of ordinary language a structural approach is needed into which socio-psychological and linguistic concepts and methods could be integrated. One suitable methodological approach (of which we made satisfactory use) is facet theory. Since reports on this procedure and resulting findings have been presented elsewhere (Galliker et al., 1994; 1995; Graumann 1994; 1995), here some conceptual issues and their methodological implications will be presented only as far as they are relevant for the topic of this paper.

But the following should be prefaced by a word of caution: The potential correlation between the social functions and the mental and linguistic representation of discriminatory acts is complicated by two factors that one has to take into account before starting research on verbal discrimination.

(1) One factor is the historical development familiar to students of prejudice, especially of racism. Researchers in this field have

documented the fact that, since the 1950s, mainly due to the success of the Civil Rights Movement and other Human Rights NGOs, direct and blatant forms of racism and sexism, have, at least publicly, changed to more indirect and subtle (some say: "modern") forms of expressing and transmitting prejudice. (For evidence and examples of "aversive racism" cf. Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986, for "modern" and "symbolic racism" cf. McConahay, 1986; Sears, 1988, for subtle vs. blatant manifestations of ethnic prejudice in the United States and in Western Europe Pettigrew, 1989; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). What these recent forms of racism have in common is an ambivalence between two opposing ideals and belief systems which, according to Myrdal (1944), constitute the "American dilemma". The underlying conflict, however, between a universalistic norm (like humanitarianism or equality of rights) and particularistic norms (like solidarity with one's own class or kind) is not confined to the US-American situation.

Taken together this means - and can be endorsed by our own findings (Graumann, 1995) - that racism, and similarly, ethnocentrism, sexism, etc. still exist, but their ventilation in public has largely become more indirect, guarded, concealed. Hence, we expected and, indeed, encountered more hidden than blatant forms of verbal discrimination, in spite of the fact that our topic was the linguistic manifestation of xenophobia, in particular, of the discrimination against foreigners in Germany and the widely discussed issues of a limitation to granting asylum and of a (not yet existing) law of immigration which have been and still are very controversial (Graumann, 1995).

Fortunately, there are linguistic tools, partly supplied by speech-act theory (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969), that enable us to identify both the open or straightforward and the guarded or veiled modes of verbal discrimination. Following both speech act theory and the necessities of a social-psychological approach, we worked with the following distinctions: Direct vs. indirect and explicit vs. implicit discriminatory speech. Socio-psychologically (rather than linguistically), *direct* means that the target of discrimination is directly addressed in unmediated speech from actor to victim, from an ingroup member to an outgroup member. *Indirect* means that the discriminator does *not talk to but about* an outgroup (member). Since in this case the actor talks to another member of his/her own group, this is ingroup talk about an "alien" group, which may strengthen group cohesion and mark intergroup differences, etc. The fact that a large part of such discriminatory ingroup talk is presented as humorous aggression against an external enemy, such as prejudicial and malicious jokes and stories that are appreciated and applauded by an eager audience may indicate the group-dynamic function of this indirect type of discriminatory communication.

But even in dialogues between interactants of divergent perspectives (on the issue of legally admitting foreigners seeking asylum in Germany) we found that occasionally opponents to immigration, who knew that their partner was a proponent, once they got themselves worked up, 'dropped their guards', became openly hostile, and disclosed rude forms of xenophobia: They verbally deprived foreigners in general or "just" Turks or West Africans of the major attributes of civilization or even humanity.

Between direct talking to and indirect talking about we had to introduce an intermediate type of directness which we called *semi-direct*. It refers to situations in which ingroup talk about a discriminated target group or person is evidently *overheard* and frequently meant to be overheard by the target person who, on the other hand, is ostensibly ignored (Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985; Kirkland, Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1987). The typical situation is that of a queue or file of persons waiting to be served by a cashier, but held up by a foreigner who seems to have problems that evoke comments from and among the German customers.

(2) The other linguistically more important distinction is between explicit and implicit verbal discrimination. In the *explicit* case the propositional content is in itself discriminatory when, e.g., a negative predicate is attributed to somebody on categorical grounds or when derogatory ethnic slurs (or "ethnophaulisms", Roback, 1944, 1979) like "nigger" or "chink" are used (Greenberg, Kirkland & Pyszczynski, 1988; Greenberg & Pyszczynsky, 1985; Kirkland et al., 1987; Mullen & Johnson, 1993). They are easily understood by everybody who understands the language. In direct and semi-direct interactions such explicit utterances are the blatant, i.e., offensively obtrusive forms of discriminatory aggression, frequently meant to provoke and hurt the outgroup member.

For the so-called "modern" forms of prejudice, however, *implicit* discrimination is the option. Yet its identification poses a series of problems since here the discriminatory message must be *inferred* by the recipient (and by the social scientist) from an utterance or, even worse, from a context of utterances which are

not discriminatory *per se*. Their decodability as discriminatory frequently depends on inconspicuous linguistic signs that serve as *contextualization cues* (Gumperz, 1982; 1992). These refer others to the context without which listeners would not understand the discriminatory meaning of an utterance. This may be briefly illustrated by the following examples from our corpus: "*She is Turkish, but honest and very clean*", says a German housewife chatting in her group. That a person is Turkish is as harmless as that she is honest or clean. The latter attributes are even positive, i.e., socially desirable. It is only the "but" between the nationality and the attribution of two desirable traits that refers the listener to a stock of knowledge in which being Turkish is not associated with honesty and cleanliness. Or, when a German immigrant from Roumania proudly reports: "*We got along with everybody, even with Jews*", it is again a particle, "even", that implies the message: We got along with everybody although this may seem improbable "knowing" the Jewish character. It is these inconspicuous *buts* and *evens* that refer the listener to the social stock of knowledge that the speaker trusts his or her audience will share. Needless to say that the so-called "stock of knowledge" includes the socially shared stock of prejudice, stereotypes and other common but silent assumptions. But whatever the epistemological value of this stock of assumptions is, it is the *necessary inferential basis* or presupposition for our understanding of implicit speech and, hence, of our understanding of many "subtle" kinds of racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, ageism, etc. It should be added that "our" refers to the native speaker and maybe, although less so, to those with an above-average proficiency of a foreign language. This is important to keep in



mind if the discriminatory effects of xenophobia are studied across the boundaries of cultural and linguistic communities. This bilingual proviso has added further to our conceptual model of verbal discrimination (Figure 1).

(insert Figure 1 here)

The schema displays discrimination by means of language as a multi-faceted phenomenon that can be *ordered and investigated* along three major features: *form, context, and communication*. "Form" refers, on the one hand, to the linguistic *realization* of explicit vs. implicit discrimination, on the other hand, to the social *functions* that we were able to validate: *separation, devaluation, and fixation*, as described above. Because it is these three facets that practically define discrimination we have called them the "nuclear facets". Since verbal discrimination, mainly in its implicit realization, is contingent upon the context in which it is practiced, we provided for an account of the situation (*direct, semi-direct, and indirect*). With Schwartz & Struch's concept in mind of a dehumanization in case of discrepant *value hierarchies* between ingroup and outgroup, we provided for a slot for the identification of such hierarchies. Furthermore, we had learnt that it makes a difference, at least in the realization of verbal discrimination, whether it is practiced in a more *public* or more *private* context.

Finally, one may define verbal discrimination as an intentional harmdoing. But it takes two to tango; there is no guarantee that an intended discrimination is also understood as such. Conversely, we have come across quite a few cases where people felt hurt by

acts of discrimination of which the originator was unaware. Although we had excluded cases of "sending" but not "receiving" discriminatory speech in our definition, we have tried to account for both the *encoding* and the *decoding* in discriminatory discourse. (Meanwhile, Franco & Maass (1996) have explicitly studied the role of intentional control in biased language and emphasised the lower controllability of implicit outgroup discrimination.

Since this multifaceted schema is also a comprehensive research program it has to be added that so far we have only studied some of its facets, mainly function and realization.

The term "*facet*" is used here on purpose since we have made good use of facet theory as a methodological tool (Galliker et al., 1994; Graumann, 1994). Louis Guttman (1959) has very early paved the way when he introduced facet theory into the study of intergroup beliefs and action. Since we had started with a conceptual analysis of verbal discrimination and developed a set of mutually exclusive categories we arrived at facets that could be represented in *mapping sentences* of which one form is presented in figure 2.

(insert Figure 2 here)

This "mapping sentence" not only reflects our structural concept of discriminatory speech. It was also the basis for the experimental operations and for the interpretation of our results. The mapping sentence contains the major (although slightly

reduced) elements of our conceptual model and indicates the way in which we operationalised verbal discrimination.

In a series of experiments we succeeded in reconstructing the three original nuclear facets, each with two or three elements, as structurally essential for explicit as well as implicit verbal discrimination (see Galliker et al., 1994; 1995), for a detailed presentation of the experiments).

With respect to the guiding thesis of this paper the concluding question then must be: Has the change from blatant to subtle, from open to more concealed forms of verbal discrimination changed its aggressive character? The first answer is affirmative. Leaving right-wing and skinhead rallies aside, discriminatory aggression in its "modern" form is, indeed, less impudently straightforward, less unabashed and, taken at face value, has grown socially less undesirable. But, and this is the other side of the coin, is the intention to harm others, to hurt their human dignity, to deprive them of their individuality by means of a more sophisticated and roundabout language, by the use of sly hints and of ambiguities, by insinuations "between the lines" less aggressive than its crude manifestation? Some psychologists may consider this a question of definition. We know, however, that members of all kinds of underprivileged minorities, social and ethnic groups feel attacked and hurt, at least threatened or rejected by discriminatory discourse as much as before. We also know from the sample of subjects whom we had discuss the immigration issue in dyadic groups that every now and then our subjects lower their controls and talk themselves into an openly humiliating and aggressive xenophobia. Both observations are good reasons for social

psychology to take up the study of verbal discrimination as a case of intergroup aggression.

Notes

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