ABSTRACT. This article addresses xenophobic discourse and how traits responsible for its main effect, the definition and defence of social hierarchies, can be shown to disperse into the normalisms of daily communication. Mostly, it is not openly prejudiced slander that has the most salient and widespread discriminatory consequences, but rather those forms that sneak under the threshold of awareness. Basic to my analysis is the observation that the habitualized inner dynamics of talk about ‘foreigners’ influences the possibilities for identity politics in direct interaction between immigrants and native Viennese. This predisposed dynamics, grounding in a reoccurring pattern of topical connections, has stained the normalized common sense, where it is not so easily identifiable and commonly no longer regarded as racist. It needs to be uncovered so that the discriminatory effects, even in utterances of the supposedly ‘tolerant majority’, are revealed.

KEY WORDS: anti-racism, discrimination, dominant discourse, everyday racism, hegemony, normalization, perspectivity, polymorphism, xenophobia

Introduction

The infiltration of normalized discourses by partisan, interested ideologies is a challenging field of inquiry. Different aspects may be analysed in the social processes through which particular perspectives become dominant or – as will be my main task here – in the actual power that these, however ‘dominant’, discourses gain over social relationships. As a sad fact, xenophobic discourse can be regarded as dominant in many social situations. There is a rich selection of monographs describing its emblematic structure and/or its overall function in social hierarchies (e.g. van Dijk, 1984; Quasthoff, 1987; Billig, 1991; Essed, 1991; Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Reisigl and Wodak, 2001), or its distribution through mass media (e.g. van Dijk, 1991; Wodak and Matouschek, 1993; Jäger and Link,
1993), but few studies concern its use and influence in the potentially most crucial context: in contact situations with immigrants, where natives can substantiate the rhetoric, social or – as in legal disputes – even material advantages they might gain from the dominant discourse.

‘Discourses’ here are understood as recurrent and recognizable ‘patterns of meaning which organize the various symbolic systems human beings inhabit, and which are necessary for us to make sense to each other’ (Parker, 1999: 3). They refer to the production and reproduction of shared common sense knowledge feeding all interactions, and the power effects they exert on social practices. The inevitable problem is what can be said to be shared by whom in socially shared meanings (Hanks, 1996; Edwards, 1997). Social perspectives and the discursive resources representing them vary among different social milieus, ‘limited provinces of meaning’ (Schütz), and what is ‘common sense’ in one social group, for others might look bluntly ideological. The experience of ‘polynormality’, of different ‘normalities’ in society, is a fundamental experience everybody has to make very early during socialization, and to handle its pitfalls successfully is a basic skill of moving in and between social realms (Gotsbachner, 1995). To a certain degree, different sets of common-sense meaning are open to strategic negotiation and dispute, although it is an important question how some – such as the xenophobic stereotypes analysed here – gain their stability and practical force. The processes, how specific ‘normalities’ occupy a more general social scale, control and are controlled by power relations. Tracing the eminent role of discourses in that ‘contest of classification’ might be one of the big challenges of discourse analysis.

The study of prejudiced discourse seems to be a prolific field concerning these questions. Prejudiced discourses, like xenophobic or racist modes of talk, have by definition a narrow scope of topics which makes it easier to reconstruct their semantic organization. And the documentation of their social impact has made up for an important, well-established sociological subdiscipline to build upon.

My first aim is to reveal the ‘common-sense’ knowledge which xenophobic people in Vienna employ while talking about immigrants. In the regularities of what native interlocutors presume to be evident regarding the character, status and alleged mentality of ‘foreigners’, their common categorizations and social perspective become observable.

The second section of the article then will elicit the underlying topological scheme and ‘inner logic’ in discourse about ‘foreigners’. ‘Logic’ here is not meant in the philosophical sense, but as self-constructed consistency in modes of thinking and talking, or what Foucault addressed as rules of discursive formations (Foucault, 1973; McHoul and Grace, 1993). It concerns how common representations are made to ‘fit’, internally and externally, to the daily experiences and their conceptually guided explanations, so that they can be sustained as true, close-to-experience accounts of the social world. Using examples of unelicited talk, I will try to explain how the inner logic of xenophobic discourse is maintained in confrontation with a competing discourse, for instance an
emancipatory migrant discourse. Basically, it must be observed that their two ‘master topics’ – ‘cultural difference’ and ‘poor foreigners’ – are ambiguous, they mean different things to different people. What can be said, is that this ambivalence is a functional one, helping to veil the xenophobic logic in certain modes of talking.

The third section then turns to interethnic encounters, the main field of inquiry in our research about the ‘Negotiation of Social Identities in Conversations between Immigrants and Native Viennese’. Here I trace the role of discourse about ‘foreigners’ as a symbolic resource of identity politics, in which more or less dominant representations are used as available social profiles in the negotiation of rights, entitlements and social reputation. Using examples from a legal institution, an urban mediation centre, I want to look at normalized forms of xenophobic discourse and their effect in an ‘official’ setting. The thrilling question here will be, what kind of perspectival ‘common sense’ enters the referential frame of interaction, accepted as ‘normal’ by native as well as by immigrant parties and the mediators? The inner logic and preordained dynamics of discourse about ‘foreigners’ influence the ways utterances are interpreted, and what can be ‘adequately’ said by or about immigrants. It makes up for a concealed discriminatory effect in identity negotiations maintaining established social hierarchies.

Observing Philip Cohen’s (1992) warning, I do not want to explain all xenophobic or racist discourses from a single source, equating different kinds and sorts of racism, because they require different methods of investigation and different forms of social or political counteraction. Nonetheless, what I want to exemplify using transcripts of talk from research in Austria might at times look very familiar for sociolinguists working on xenophobic gossip in other parts of the world. Sometimes xenophobic stories and arguments documented in different sites as far apart as Germany, New Zealand or Belgium, reveal quite similar figures (cf. Wodak and Matouschek, 1993). The kind of xenophobic discourse we encountered predominantly during our fieldwork in Vienna is oriented towards a prototype of ‘foreigner’, which is modelled after the imagined picture of a ‘simple’, uneducated Anatolian, Serbian or Bosnian ‘guest worker’. It pertinaciously allocates immigrants to a corresponding social position, even though most immigrants in Austria do not fit this imagery and are often well established in ‘modern’ life, urban citizens like others too, which run businesses or even have academic training. For in most public situations there is a more or less effective taboo against openly xenophobic discourse, the institutionalized forms are reproduced and stabilized more concealed, as an implicit understanding of ‘practically adequate’ talk and behaviour. My inquiry thus concentrates on the overall topological structure and habitualized dynamics of discourse about ‘foreigners’.

Prejudiced social knowledge in gossip

The social impact of xenophobic discourse on societies might possibly show stronger influences in situations in which political measurements are taken (see
e.g. Wodak and van Dijk, 2000) or economic decisions are made (see e.g. Day, 1994; Freyberg, 1994), or in the dissemination and stabilization of common concepts through the media (see e.g. van Dijk, 1991; Jäger and Link, 1993). But it is in face-to-face interaction that a feeling for the plausibility of discourses is constructed and negotiated, and where the terms of validity (‘Geltungsbedingungen’) are realized, reconsidered, proven or challenged, which feed the common sense of everyday communication. For that reason we regarded it as important to study the constitution of the emblematic logic of xenophobic discourse not in written newspaper texts, but in oral communication, and not in interviews, but in unelicited talk from either in-groups or interethnic encounters which people themselves regarded as important for their lives.

The examples I will use in my analysis are pieces of naturally occurring talk recorded in sociological fieldwork. Although fieldwork, or participant observation grounded in the mutual familiarity between researchers and researched established during continuous contact, is maybe one of the most cumbersome methods of data collection, the richness it yields is necessary to assess problems arising from the contextualization of the transcribed conversations.4

One advantage is certainly the opportunity to display situated actions, which cause the participants to speak the ways they do, and the role these particular activities play in their immediate life worlds (cf. Sacks, 1992; Edwards, 1997). Interview data would cut utterances off from their most important function: their meaning as interest guided pragmatic movements in real social settings. Understanding discourse as means of social empowerment and repression needs to consider these specific actions, showing their construction of locally accomplished meanings as well as their systematic relation to dominant social representations. Especially the analysis of identity politics needs to observe that the procedural and the ‘social knowledge’ elements of discourse used in interaction are inseparably interwined. In the same vein our text analysis as such started from an ethnomethodological/conversation analytic approach like the one of Werner Kallmeyer (1994/95), but tried to emphasize the social power aspect by moulding it in a fruitful combination with a critical discourse analytic approach.

Talk documented in fieldwork has a second advantage encouraging this combined approach (which, for example, Potter, 1996 has propagated), namely the one that it allows more reliable statements about participants’ discursive–cognitive resources. In tracing the regularity of what they treat as ‘common-sense knowledge’ across different local situations, one can follow in considerable detail how they build their respective worldviews. Using responses of other participants, which already contain an interpretation of the previous utterances, as reflections on what is being said, leads one deeper to statements about what can be observed to be actually functioning as this ‘common-sense knowledge’. Considering thematic progression in everyday talk – here not meant in the textlinguistic sense, but as how stereotypical themes ‘tend to mutually serve as each other’s retrieval cues’ (van Dijk, 1984: 32) – one can see it is sometimes so deeply entrenched that even subtle clues are understood and trigger off cascades of common categorizations.
I show that in the basic topics of xenophobic discourse about ‘foreigners’. My first transcript is from a recording of mostly elderly people in a community centre in Vienna, who come together once a week, drink coffee and exchange gossip. As the centre is situated in the Viennese district with the highest share of immigrants – at that time about 35 percent of the population – their gossip regularly spins around ‘foreigners’. In the passage just before the following excerpt they have been talking generally about problems arising from that situation.

‘JANITOR Gossip’ (NBZ. 14.3.1997: 268–96)

1 FRI: Also bitte i kõn nix sogn, bei uns im Haus san kane Ausländer, des is a Eigentumshaus, do Well, I can’t complain, we don’t have any foreigners in our building, it’s a condominium,

2 kummt kana eini, weil dos kõn er sich no net daleistn. (.) Ned? I man, where no one gets in, because he can’t afford that. (.) You know what I mean,

3 [der kõn sich net a Wohnung kaufn um a Million, oder no mehr wos jetzt scho hot,]= [they can’t buy flats for a million Schillings, or even more they must be now,]=

4 SAB: [Naja. Wir habn ein Privathaus da wohnen auch kane Ausländer, außer der [Uh-huh. We’ve got a private building and there aren’t any foreigners besides the

5 Hausbesorgerin] (.) und die is (.) sind sehr nett. janitor] (.) and she’s, they’re (.) quite nice

6 FRI: =ned? =Y’know?

7 FOR: De san fleißig, .hhh des Hausbesorgerin. Wir hobn a Jugoslawin, .hhh aber die putzt They are hard working, .hhh the wife. She’s Yugoslavian, .hhh but she cleans

8 ununterbrochen, und geht no um um (.) waß i – halber Sechse orbeiten ins Ron-, ah ins constantly, and then goes to work around (.) I don’t know five thirty at the Ron-, no, the

9 .hhh Raimundtheater als Billeteurin - .hhh Raimundtheater. Checking tickets -

10 HUB: Na guat, de [müaßn oarba tn]= Well yes, but [they’ve gotta work,]=

11 FOR: [in die Garderobe]. [at the coat check].

12 HUB: = sonst verlierns die Hausmastawohnung und die Oarbeit verlierns. Und drumm = or else they lose the janitor flat and the job. And that’s why

13 hobns an Druck. they’re stressed out.

14 FOR: Ober die soll jo daham sein in der Nacht, oder? Wonn ana kummt und wül eine. (.) But they’ve gotta be home at night, right? If someone wants in, (.)

15 muaß er beim Hausmasta leitn. he’s gotta ring the janitor’s doorbell.
16 FRI: Sollte er, bei uns ist das so in unserem Haus. .hhh (.) Mir glaub’ ich, es ist voll der Sinn, .hhh (.) Ich denke, dass es so ist.

17 österreichische [Staatbürgerschaft], =
Austrian [citizenship], =

18 FOR: [Das hört dann der Aa].
[Yeah, ours too].

19 FRI: = mir hört dann eine Ungarin, .hhh also die ist ja die halbe Zeit nicht da und wanns putzt, putzt’s und
= we’ve got a Hungarian, .hhh and she’s not there half the time too and when she cleans

20 wonns net putzt, putzt’s net, sie hört si sogar obmelden losen, ned, weil sie a zweite
she cleans, when she doesn’t she doesn’t, she even withdraw registration, you know, cuz she

21 Lohnsteuerkortn hod hört müssen und do hots Abgobn zahln müßn. na, .hhh jetzt zählt ma die
tax card had to get a second social security card cuz she had to pay taxes, right, .hhh and now we pay

22 aso – jetzt ist zwar scho in Pension, .hhh ober putzt tuats, wann’s es gfreut, wann’s vierzehn
her under the table – although she’s already retired, .hhh and so she cleans when she

23 Tog ned putzt, is aa in Ordnung. Ned?
pleases, and if she doesn’t clean for two weeks, it doesn’t matter. Y’know?

24 FOR: Na jo.
Oh well,

25 FRI: Und wann ma aber dann den Dreck vor der Tür zammkehrt und ihr das Häuferl liegen
And if you sweep the dirt in front of the door into a little pile and leave it

26 laßt, dann hots di.
for her, then you get it.

27 FOR: Jo jo, waß i eh.
Yeah, I know anyhow.

28 (3)

What is remarkable about this short exchange is the unexpected turn it takes. Mrs Forster, a retired employee of 59, who is at first very eager to sing the praises of the woman cleaning the house where she lives, even exaggerating her cleanliness and diligence (7–9), suddenly, and seemingly for no reason, changes the course of her narration (14/15). When Mr Friedl, 68, joins in with another story, maintaining the complete opposite about immigrant janitors, she nonetheless agrees to the final conclusion, followed by a consensual 3 seconds’ pause, as if nothing else could be added to that. This conversation becomes even more interesting when considering that a positive portrayal of an immigrant occurred here for the first and last time during more than an hour of gossip about ‘foreigners’. One needs to take a closer look at how the thematic continuity of this exchange is accomplished, first on the plane of situated activity and then on the plane of the social knowledge feeding it. Reconstructing its inner logic reveals a trait, which can be seen as typical for discourse about ‘foreigners’: the tendency to tilt.5
Mrs Friedl opens with an apparent denial (van Dijk, 1984; Reisigl and Wodak, 2001), although rather atypically its function here is not that of a procataleptic disclaimer, but nonetheless serving the positive self-presentation of the speaker. She initiates the first thread of the plot by announcing that she has no contact and no problems with immigrants, because she lives in an expensive flat (1–3). Mrs Sabine (39, housewife) and Mrs Forster join this line of discussion by affirming that they too live in purely ‘Austrian’ houses, except for the immigrated janitors, whom they describe as ‘quite nice’, cleanly and hard working (4–9). This positive reference arises from an act, which at the same time is an act of social demarcation: they do not have to relate to ‘foreigners’, because they live in upper middle-class houses. Their gossip about ‘foreigners’ is thus closely knit into their talk about their own social position, where they agree that having problems with immigrants is a matter of social status and distinction. Mr Huber (59, former professional, now unemployed) then devalues the example of Mrs Forster’s janitor by suggesting that the diligence of immigrants is not to be regarded as a personal characteristic, but an effect of the social pressure exerted on them (10–13). From this point on, Mrs Forster and Mrs Friedl jointly try to correct the general picture, which legitimates why they do not want to relate to ‘foreigners’. It corresponds to the group’s negative attitudes towards immigrants maintained throughout the whole meeting, fed by stories, which they use as exemplifying evidence.

Since the classical studies of Elias and Scotson (1965), ‘blame gossip’ of this sort has been analysed for its essential function in the designation of social status concerning persons and groups. The devaluation of the only example of positively depicted immigrants is embedded into what must be regarded as the salient activity of the conversation: the referential and predicational construction of immigrants in opposition to natives in general and the participants in particular. Linguistically this constitution of ‘we’ and ‘they’ is mirrored in a number of clauses. For instance, in the ‘we’ referring to Mrs Friedl’s house community (19, 21) the immigrated janitor is not included. Correspondingly, the particularizing, androcentric synecdoche ‘he’, a collective singular for immigrants in the opening sentence (2) is ‘typical of stereotypes (. . .) and prejudiced discourse, in which statements about persons are made in a levelling, generalizing, essentializing and eternalizing manner, in which groups of social actors are presupposed to be homogeneous and are selectively ascribed a specific, allegedly shared feature, trait, mentality and so on’ (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: 63). Other linguistic manoeuvres constituting the participants as group appear in the use of particles and deictic expressions, which support a presuppositional structure facilitating obviousness and unison, as ‘eh’ (‘anyhow’, 27), ‘aa’ (‘too’, 19) or the demonstrative pronoun ‘dossölbe’ (‘the same’ 16). Back questions, such as ‘oder?’ (‘right?’ 14), or the ‘Ned?’ (‘You know’) appearing several times (2, 6, 20, 23), too are expressions of their verbal activity, grasping for consent while representing immigrants and attributing social positions.

Picking up the thematic clues in that example and comparing them with
related stretches during this and other conversations enables one to ‘fill in’ the prejudiced ‘social knowledge’, which the participants in the coffee-klatch regularly presume and which is necessary to make their stories work. One can easily follow here how they flexibly construct and maintain their knowledge about immigrants by selectively connecting personal narratives and general assumptions. Neither the pure specification of events nor the open enunciation of the underlying generalization (‘all foreigners are lazy and only brought in work by force’) could stand alone, the two strains depend on each other in their oscillation for making the thematic development of the exchange plausible. ‘Shifts are fluidly made between arguments from principle and praxis . . . ’ (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 92) rendering possible the self-confirming and perception-guiding topology characteristic for prejudiced discourse (van Dijk, 1984; Kalpaka and Räthzel, 1986).

The main reference to ‘social knowledge’, which the participants employ can be seen in the way they use the word ‘foreigner’. Because the ‘foreign’ janitors they refer to are Austrian citizens (16–18), it is obviously not the original sense of the word, found in dictionaries, but rather a peculiar one, characterized by a collection of ascribed attributes.7

The first important characterization is in Mrs Friedl’s supposition that immigrants cannot afford to buy flats in condominium houses, which means: all immigrants are poor, they have little money. This is one of the most common generalized assumptions in xenophobic discourse, which can be illustrated by numerous examples. Later the researcher states that they themselves are foreigners, when they travel, to which the participants in the community centre react with wild protest: when they go abroad, they are paying ‘guests’, they say, in contrast to ‘foreigners’ in Austria, who have no money and ‘live from our assets’. Under this logic, tourists are not regarded as foreigners, except tourists from Eastern Europe, whom the participants regard as ‘foreigners’ nonetheless, because ‘they mostly don’t have money’.8 This reaction occurred to us quite often during fieldwork, sometimes even with very similar phrasing, proving the widespread use of this notion of ‘foreigner’.9 Even if one can hardly overlook the sizeable and increasing group of immigrants who have brought or acquired considerable wealth, this particular conceptualization has become social knowledge, because – in a sense discussed later – only immigrants characterized as poor are perceived as ‘foreigners’.

Mrs Sabine’s and Mrs Forster’s positive depiction of their (‘nice’, ‘hard working’) immigrated janitors does not enter the group’s general characterization of ‘foreigners’, but is handled as an exception – one good example for the flexible construction of ‘knowledge’ mentioned above. Mr Huber here (10, 12) draws the line between the particular and the general by introducing the topic of immigrants’ supposed mentality, which is the critical turning point in this story about janitors. Challenging the validity of the positive example, Mr Huber assures that diligence is not seen as a general characteristic of ‘foreigners’, a turn that Mrs Friedl then supports with her story about the alleged laziness, unreliability and
even illegal activities (defrauding taxes, 20/21) of her janitor. The topical switch is first taken over by Mrs Forster in lines 14/15, in which she reconceptualizes the very same activities she had just counted as expression of the hard working life of the immigrant woman, and now sees as a sign of lacking fulfillment of her original duties. Janitors in Vienna get an official quarter in the house, where they are responsible for cleaning and for minor repairs in the general parts of the house. Nowadays, it certainly is not the duty of the janitor to stay home all night, to open the front door for people who have forgotten their keys, as Mrs Forster suggests. Her endeavor to find something negative here is just as obvious as her effort to praise just a few seconds before. When Mrs Friedl follows up by introducing her story as ‘the same’ (16), although she characterizes her main actress as dirty and lazy instead of tidy and diligent, the sameness has to be found in its substantiation of the alleged ‘wrong mentality’. This is a typical example of what Sacks (1992) conceptualized as ‘second story’, sharing with the first story of Mrs Forster only the selected characteristics Mrs Friedl wants to emphasize. She sees to it that what finally enters the general picture, from which social positions are defined, is that by mentality immigrants are work-shy and lazy. The representation has tilted.

The inner logic of xenophobic discourse

Now the imputation of a deviant, ‘wrong’ mentality is not only pivotal to the outcome of our story, it plays a very important role in the topological ordering of discourse about ‘foreigners’ in general. The ascription of certain patterns of thought, of motives and personal characteristics is the main reference point in the designation of social identities. Note that the formulation Mrs Friedl uses to express subliminally her opinion about the woman who ‘cleans when she pleases’ (21) is constructed as a riddle which can be solved only by inserting that it is the mental attitude of the janitor herself, who allegedly thinks that ‘if she doesn’t clean for two weeks, it doesn’t matter’ (22). Mental attitudes guiding observable actions are open to willfully distorted interpretation, and what in observation of acts of a native might be read as a situationally appropriate reaction, in the case of an immigrant often is looked at as instantiation of their cultural difference.

Imputed mentality is one of the elements making the xenophobic scheme of ‘foreigners’ flexible and adaptable to various situations, while keeping its inner logic stable. It also changes the deeper meaning of the other basic assumption about immigrants, ‘foreigners are poor’, from a statement with a certain factual basis, into a normative one, one that is resistant to contradictory experience. For example, later in the same discussion, Mr Huber mentions that many immigrants save money to send back to their countries of origin, where they build their own houses. Mrs Friedl does not want to understand that, and she asks ‘how can they send money back home. hhh when they always complain that they pay too much for their flats here? (.) They don’t earn that much.’ (Nbz.14.3.97: 475–86) Mrs Friedl clearly accepts a schematic representation of immigrants according to
which they could not have that much spare money. Her explanation, given immediately after, points to an alleged trait of immigrants’ mentality, their laziness, irresponsibility and suspect consumerism. That ‘foreigners’ cannot have money is a common assumption underlying many stories about immigrants we collected, and another important element in the topological structure of this evaluative model, assigning social positions, on which they are built. The habitualized connection of these two basic topics, the imputed bad character of immigrants and their depiction as have-nots, provides for an inner logic of xenophobic discourse: it submits that ‘foreigners’ do not deserve it better, because they have a deviant mentality, are uneducated, lazy, work-shy and do not adapt to the dominant culture.

Returning to the initially mentioned problem of social control in ‘polynormality’, we have to ask how xenophobic discourse can maintain its inner logic even in the face of competing social knowledge. For that purpose I want to sketch out a topological mapping of xenophobic ‘blame gossip’ as derived from our corpus of talk recorded in fieldwork (discussed in Gotsbachner, 1998). It reconstructs recurrent topical connections similar to those observed in the thematical progression of the examples above. I confront this xenophobic pattern of talk with another kind of discourse about immigrants, an emancipatory discourse, which I have not touched upon yet and reconstruct here heuristically as an opposing pole.

Figure 1 is organized around the two ‘master-topics’, ‘poor foreigners’ and ‘cultural difference’, which have been identified as focal concepts of discourse about ‘foreigners’ not only in our transcripts (cf. Wodak and Matouschek, 1993). But differently oriented people understand and conceptualize these ‘master-topics’ in different ways. Accordingly their semantic counterparts in different discourses are delineated here as two columns, the xenophobic version left and an emancipatory understanding on the right. The ‘master-topics’ themselves are ambiguous, because in xenophobic blame-gossip and in emancipatory discourse they are evaluated and handled differently, they support disparate representations of the social world used by discursive practices contradicting each other. Within these practices themselves, as shown above, the inner logic of the discursive schemata is maintained nonetheless rigidly, although in social contact, when the orientation of the participants is not yet revealed, the deeper social meaning of the topics may not yet be transparent. I show this ambivalence as having a functional aspect that contributes to their strength as everyday concepts.

Talk about ‘poor foreigners’ or about ‘cultural difference’ can vary in meaning according to the associations it triggers off, either emancipatorily as ‘social weakness’ and ‘fascinating plurality’, or xenophobic as ‘have-nots’ and ‘deviant mentality’. The topics gain this evaluative character only from the respective ‘social knowledge’ with which they are constructed, the more detailed items they are ‘filled up’ with, some of which we have come across already in the analysed conversations and which in the figure are marked with a point •. And clearly, the specific ways of constructing the topics feed two contrary sets of inner logic.
leading to very different conclusions, drawn under the bottom line: what in one
discourse concludes in a plea for tolerance and recognition, in the other is part of
the legitimization of why immigrants need not be treated as equal citizens.
The xenophobic scheme serves as a topological map for participants’ formu-
lation of their stories, which sometimes are made to fit quite strainingly.
Categorization and classification of events and social characters provides for an
opportunity to reframe stories according to its inner logic, ‘controlling the flux of
experience of physical and social reality’ (Hodge and Kress, 1993: 63). Maybe
giving another example will illuminate this operation in detail.

In a conversation recorded in a public park three women complain, while
watching the children of immigrants at play, that ‘Austria one day will not be
Austria any more’ (Pk.29.9.97: 53/54). Mrs Gredler, a Sudeten-German widow
of 72, exclaims ‘They breed like rabbits!’ and Mrs Deimel, 83, replies ‘Yes, because
they get paid. Did I – did we get something for our children? Nothing!’
(Pk.29.9.97: 107/8). In this passage they start with what in my figure is the inner
conclusion of xenophobic slander, ‘foreigners live from our assets’, here repre-
sented in their allegation that there are so many immigrants in Austria
‘because they get paid’ by the welfare state (cf. footnote 9). And then, working
their way up, according to the topological scheme, they go on to substantiate this
assumption with an illustrating story: Mrs Gredler introduces the figure of an ex-
Yugoslavian plumber, whom she reports to have said that in the nearby vegetable
and fruit market, which is mostly run by immigrants, ‘the money just lies on the

Figure 1. Semantic fields in discourse about ‘foreigners’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Xenophobic</th>
<th>Emancipatory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blame-Gossip</strong></td>
<td><strong>Discourse</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• exploiting welfare</td>
<td>• exploitation in working relations</td>
</tr>
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<td>• parasites</td>
<td>• live in expensive and poor flats</td>
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<tr>
<td>• criminals</td>
<td>• legal discrimination</td>
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<td><strong>Have-Not</strong></td>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
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<td>Poor Foreigners</td>
<td>Weakness</td>
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<td><strong>Deviant</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cultural</strong></td>
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<td>Mentality</td>
<td>Difference</td>
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<td><strong>Fascinating</strong></td>
<td><strong>Plurality</strong></td>
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<td>Mentality</td>
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| *‘foreigners live from our assets’* | *plea for tolerance*
| suspension of reciprocity | recognition of equality |
| in rights and entitlements | in rights |
| | and diversity in culture |
street’. Facing the considerable economic success of this prospering open market there is some truth in his words. But the women do not interpret them as an expression of the plumbers’ spirit of entrepreneurship, as would be their usual meaning as a common saying, but literally, and thus as an expression of his alleged unrealistic economic expectations and clientelistic thinking. After having introduced the immigrated professional in that unfavourable way, Mrs Gredler goes on in her narration: ‘You have to ask where he takes the money from. When he came, he had a condominium in no time, he opened a shop, has three, four cars already, now he is said to have a house already too. Well(.) How long must one of us work before he – before he can afford this? There must be something wrong – no, there must be something wrong. Yes. Either he has to do with hashish or – there must be something wrong. He said in the Brunnen Market, he said, the money just lies on the street. He said.’ (Pk, 29.9.97: 121–128). The highly presumptive argumentation is introduced by an appellative address, and its illocutionary force strengthened by threefold repetition of the suggestive final assertion.

Obviously, the example of an immigrant who is economically successful and not a ‘poor foreigner’ does not fit the general understanding of the participants in this conversation. But Mrs Gredler constructs her story by adopting the example to the general scheme in such a way as to not jeopardize its inner logic and even support it, as if it was an adequate proof for her claim that immigrants ‘live from our assets’. She introduces the wealth of the ex-Yugoslavian plumber as ‘suspect consumerism’, and by exaggerating her account (‘he had a condominium in no time’, ‘three, four cars’) makes it an example of his deviant mentality, which she had introduced already in the misinterpretation of his remark ‘the money just lies on the street’. Thus, she poses the question, where he had taken his money from, which she answers herself that he must be involved in criminal activities, namely dealing illegal drugs. The logic of this wildly suggestive and extrapolating argumentation follows the xenophobic scheme, as sketched in the above figure, here made to work upside down. Starting with the conclusion (‘immigrants live from our assets’), over ‘deviant mentality’ (clientelistic thinking – a variant of laziness; and suspect consumerism) to criminality, which is a specification of ‘immigrants are have-nots’, the first item in the scheme.

Instead of relying on one’s own personal experiences, people (…) prefer the use of ‘social ready mades’ from semantic memory. This also means that the models themselves will tend to have a structure that is similar to the stereotypical ‘ethnic scripts’ that are part of the group attitude. Indeed (…) stories about personal experiences (…) have a very stereotypical content and organisation, as if they are expressions of group schematic scripts. This may mean that people ‘invent’ stories based on imagined evidence, or also that variable situations are coded and represented completely in accordance with the stereotypical organisations of such situations. (van Dijk, 1984: 32)

Fitting contradictory evidence to the stereotypical arrangement of topics, the participants secure a certain outcome and maintain its discursive function, the
defence of social hierarchies. The scheme and its inner logic allow for the processing of contesting experiences in such a way that the conclusion is always that ‘foreigners live from our assets’. This then is tacitly taken as an excuse for the suspension of reciprocity in rights and entitlements. The inner logic of discourse about ‘foreigners’ tilts perception by always painting the image in this negative way. ‘Foreigners’ are to be poor, and if they are not, if they are seen wearing designer suits or driving expensive cars or using mobile phones, they must have acquired these status attributes through illegal activities or exploitation of the welfare system.13

But, the structure of discourse about ‘foreigners’ not always needs such a severe transforming operation to reframe and digest divergent facts and social knowledge. The dialogue between Mr Huber and Mrs Friedl reproduced earlier, in which Mrs Friedl says that immigrants ‘always complain that they pay too much for their flats’, already gives a hint of how competing social knowledge might be worked into the xenophobic scheme even without changing its original content.14 Talking extensively about ‘deviant mentality’ of immigrants, she unspokenly suggests that it is their own fault, when they have to face an unfavourable position in the housing market. Cultural difference is automatically interpreted as a deficiency legitimizing discrimination. The danger in emancipatory discourse, of concentrating too much on discrimination and the weak social position of immigrants, becomes evident from this effect, because addressing only the concept of ‘poor foreigners’ cannot challenge xenophobic assumptions.15 It is a small step from immigrants’ problems to immigrants as problems, a minor change of aspects, which causes to tilt their entire representation in society.

Considering other, similar examples from our wider corpus the semantic structure of discourse about ‘foreigners’ seems to be organized in such a way that for every evaluatively positive, or at least neutral item from ‘social knowledge’ concerning the attributes and social position of immigrants, there is a direct or related negative equivalent in xenophobic discourse. In the way the items are used in discursive practices, a negative extension takes place, outweighing all positive experiences. The ambivalence of the ‘master-topics’ here has a mediating role, it allows for – however distorting – espousal or adoption of competing social representations, by enabling native participants to fit them to the xenophobic framework. This happens, as I show on ‘sense of family’ below, even with immigrants’ own representations about themselves. For example, assertions heard from immigrants such as ‘we are hard workers’ or ‘as an immigrant one gets paid less for the same work’ are turned around in the line of the xenophobic scheme into ‘immigrants threaten our working places, because they are cheaper’. Thus, the topological structure of the scheme is arranged in such a way that the inner logic is hermetically sealed, always leading to the same conclusion that ‘foreigners’ deprive ‘us’ of something. Whatever can be said about immigrants is brought to tilt into negative by the rules of formation constituting xenophobic discourse. The habitualized connection of topics sets up a habitualized dynamics of talk about ‘foreigners’ with a certain outcome and function. This predisposed
dynamics can be observed in the way participants go from one thematic item to the next, and this not only occasionally, but so regularly that its underlying pattern becomes foreseeable and finally normalized as adequate discursive practice.

Perspectives are perspectives towards perspectives. Knowingly or unknowingly in contacts with other people, one takes their perspectives into account, as one construes these. (Hannerz, 1992: 67)

To a certain extent, the topological structure of xenophobic discourse seems to have developed not completely independent in the space of social ideas, but related to competing discourses, perspectives and normalities in a very specific way. What is successful, is remembered and eventually habitualized as recurring discursive formation. It amounts to the effect that many of the items from these divergent discourses can be taken up and at least be neutralized, if not even made to ‘support’ the inner logic of the xenophobic scheme. In a corpus of unelicited talk about immigrants in various social situations one cannot fail to notice that quite commonly social knowledge items from an emancipatory discourse are used in xenophobic narratives and arguments, without the mixing of completely different ideological orientations being felt. This mixing must not necessarily point to participants’ ‘ideological dilemmas’ (Billig et al., 1988), but can be an operation already provided for in the very organization of xenophobic discourse and its emblematic positioning towards competing discourses.

For it is a well-documented characteristic of prejudiced discourse that important elements of narratives are left out and have to be filled in by the recipients (van Dijk, 1984), even the conclusion ‘foreigners live from our assets’ often remains unexplicated. In our example ‘janitor gossip’, too, the general moral of the story is omitted, and an analyst unfamiliar with the discursive repertoire of the group’s members needed to wait for a later explication (see note 8), to retrospectively make sense of it. In the story it is mobilized only in the recognizability of their verbal activity, talk about social positions, in which the aim has not to be spelled out among themselves. Although the xenophobic conclusion is massively maintained by fitting stories and arguments to the discursive scheme, at the same time it is veiled in the inner logic and dynamics of its topologic organization.

Xenophobic discourse not only guides emotionally laden modes of talking, it deploys aggressivity by its normative character. Normative first in the sense we already touched upon that it is maintained even in the face of contradictory facts, but more procedural, second, also as an orientation directing narratives towards preordained ends. In the allocation of social status and standing, which is guarded against by the inner logic of thematical progression, the predisposed dynamics fulfils its main function.

To trace the inner logic and habitualized dynamics of xenophobic talk even in interethnic interaction we now have to switch to a very different set of field locations. As proving a certain emblematic structure and discursive dynamics to be subliminally at work is a laborious task, I have to apologize for lengthily intro-
ducing the particularities of cases from a different social realm in order to make.my point.

**Xenophobic normality in interethnic interaction**

What I see as an advantage of discourse analysis, compared with other methods in social science, is its conceptualization of how discursive representations, which for certain groups of people are ‘true’, close-to-experience accounts of social reality, can become dominant, and impinge on the living circumstances of other people, who may even have profoundly different perspectives of the social world. Analysing xenophobic discourse can reveal how the legitimization of discriminatory practices is ideologically reproduced and stabilized by natives in everyday in-group talk. However, its social effects can be assessed only by observing confrontational interactions with immigrants themselves. Xenophobic gossip as an available choreography of interpretative moves determining status cannot be expected to function that smoothly there, yet it is in such situations that its social significance as a resource of identity politics is at stake.

If discourses and the perspectival views they embody become dominant, is an empirical question. It can be answered in how far specific discourses are used and internalized by ‘subordinated’ social actors while assigning their own positions compared with others within society (Hall, 1997). The graphic symmetry in my figure might have nurtured the wrong impression of two equivalent strains of discourse about immigrants confronting each other in social practice. In contrast, our observation of their respective roles as commonly accepted sense-in-action reveals a clear hegemony of xenophobic patterns setting the frame of reference for identity negotiations. The interactions we documented form a picture, that while most of the concrete xenophobic items like ‘foreigners are lazy’, ‘uneducated’ ‘have-nots’ and ‘live from our assets’ are easily identified as prejudiced, the inner logic and the corresponding dynamics of discourse about immigrants are not. They have become normalized to such an extent that they invisibly guide encounters between immigrants and native Viennese without most of the latter and even some of the former being aware of it. Just as ‘social knowledge’ originally stabilized in emancipatory discourse has been taken over in xenophobic gossip, in reverse, the inner dynamics of xenophobic discourse about ‘foreigners’ has been stabilized as an habitualized discursive element in itself, which can be shown to have dispersed into more general practices of representing immigrants.

The field experience that led us to inquire deeper into the apparent stability of these patterns, was a discussion in a pub run by a Cypriot woman. It is around the corner from the community centre of our first example. Mr Huber met young Turkish immigrants there, who were all either students, middle-class employees or, as the landlady, had their own business. In a very ironic way, they challenged Mr Huber’s evaluative images of immigrants, which he constantly and stubbornly tried to use while talking about them. Nonetheless, even if he could not maintain his concrete conceptualizations of immigrants – in fact he was defeated...
and even ridiculed every time he tried to establish them – he at last succeeded to maintain the inner logic and dynamics of discourse about ‘foreigners’, even reaching his immigrant interlocutors’ partial endorsement.19

One reason, why racist ideologies are so powerful, enduring and difficult to shift is that they possess (…) ‘practical adequacy’. (…) Racism is a false explanation and representation of social processes, yet it has sufficient appearance of explanatory validity, given the way the world is, to make it work and become acceptable as common sense. (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 31)

In light of the role of discourse in constituting meaning and social reality (Parker, 1992; Harré and Gillett, 1994; Potter, 1996), a simple distinction between distorted discourse and truly descriptive discourse or ‘true’ and ‘false’ ideology has become increasingly untenable (van Dijk, 1995). As we have seen, even emancipatory or statistically provable items can be used in a xenophobic way. Therefore, it is the discriminatory effect that must be regarded as the main criterion making discourses discernible as prejudiced or racist (Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Reisigl and Wodak, 2001) constituting a need to empirically examine its influence in the situational accomplishment of ‘practical adequacy’.

We asked immigrant informants during fieldwork, where in their daily lives they found their rights and feeling of self endanegered most severely, and they frequently complained about discriminatory treatment in bureaucratic institutions. So studying normalized xenophobic discourse in action it was only logical for us to try to gain access to an institution dealing with legal claims.

Our fields of investigation included dispute resolution proceedings at a Viennese mediation centre, an institution working subsidiary to state courts, where small criminal cases are settled. During five months, we collected a sample of cases all involving a native and an immigrant party. What makes them rewarding objects for the inquiry of identity politics is that the participants need to portray their own and their opponents’ social identity in a public setting within a very limited span of time. As the mediation procedure is designed to allow the parties bringing the personal and social background of their conflict into consideration, the competing accounts are supported and fed by negotiations of social roles, prestige and informal entitlements, which become crucial for the outcome of a dispute. In cases in which mediation fails and the parties do not reach an agreement, the matter is referred to an ordinary court and might lead to a criminal conviction, with all legal and social consequences, a pressure that is perceivable in the negotiations.

Some of the conflicts involved openly xenophobic utterances of the native parties, as in one case, where a 28-year-old Viennese worker, Mr Spiller, insulted Mr Yunus, a 33-year-old Turkish owner of a kebab restaurant. Because he saw himself impeded by Mr Yunus’ car when passing on the sidewalk, Mr Spiller called him ‘tschusch’, an abusive word in Viennese slang for East European immigrants. He was hit on the nose in the following fight and called the police, who prosecuted Mr Yunus for injury. Leaving out the details of the mediation procedure20 one can
summarize that Mr Yunus won the case by giving a strong self-presentation as respectable businessman. He established that Mr Spiller had equal share in the causes of the conflict, and therefore should pay half of the costs for his medical examination in hospital. As defendants are normally willing to pay these routine costs without protesting, Mr Yunus’ victory is quite exceptional, proving the situational convertibility of symbolic and material capital. Remarkable about his defence is that, by introducing himself as a person of respect, he only implicitly claimed he could not be called ‘tschusch’, without criticizing the use of this offensive word as such. He explained Mr Spiller’s misconduct as the product of a ‘bad mood’ while being drunk, and avoided describing him as xenophobic. In that way, Mr Yunus was able to touch upon discrimination indirectly without referring to himself as an immigrant. By building his positive self-presentation on a reflexive identity, he opted out of this categorization completely. Whether he could have won the case, had he tried to plainly thematicize his being a victim of a xenophobic act, must be left open to speculation. But in a comparable case (Gotsbachner, 1999) an ex-Yugoslavian immigrant failed after trying to establish his demand for respect without such a strong self-presentation. At the level of identity politics, his omission left an empty space for social definition, which invited a counter-representation of the native party, who characterized him as the hyper-sensitive type of immigrant, who is obsessed with honour. The picture of the poor, discriminated foreigner tilts very easily by imputations of a deviant mentality.

Natives’ attempts to ascribe tainted identities to their immigrated opponents by using common ‘foreigner’ clichés can of course be rejected by the immigrated party, but challenging their adequacy during the mediation process has certain limits. The case I want to discuss at length might reveal some constituting aspects of the pressure that the normalized social representations of ‘foreigners’ exert on strategies for identity politics that are available to immigrants.

The parties in this conflict were the Austrian lorry-driver Mr Pichler, and the Bosnian electrician Mr Bogdić. Mr Bogdić’s sister had had a relationship with Mr Pichler for three years, before she left him. In front of her house it came to a fight between Mr Pichler, who – as he said – went to ‘talk to her’, and Mr Bogdić, who had been asked by his sister to change the lock on her door, to which Mr Pichler still had a key. In the fight, Mr Pichler was wounded slightly on his forehead and called the police. Mr Bogdić was prosecuted for injury.

What was strange about the way in which Mr Pichler presented the incident in the mediation, was that he did not make any effort to disguise the impression he as the repudiated lover was almost automatically bound to make. He even admitted having been convicted for injury by a criminal court some years ago. Instead, he concentrated all his effort on stigmatizing Mr Bogdić as a ‘foreigner’ by using the formulaic sentence ‘he (.) thinks (.) he can do whatever he likes’ (ATA 17.6.97: 67/68), a typical expression commonly used in talk about alleged deviant behaviour and mentality of immigrants. As a second explanation for the causes of the conflict, Mr Pichler stated that Mr Bogdić had always unduly meddled in his relationship with his sister. One can easily see how this account draws
on common 'social knowledge' about traditional customs of the Balkans, in which brothers have to control the sexual affairs of their sisters and defend their virginity to keep the family honour. In the mediation, Mr Pichler tried to present this culturally determined motive for why Mr Bogdić had attacked him in the street.

Mr Bogdić’s defence is especially useful to our analysis, because he brought his wife, Mrs Duša, to interpret for him. While he himself spoke Serbian (indicated in the transcript by a different font), he left all the strategic work to her translation. Her strategy is therefore clearly evidenced in the obvious deviations of their descriptions.

‘SENSE OF FAMILY’ (ATA 17.6.: 180–208)

Now: how did this happen. You started somewhere in the middle.

2 DUS˘: Ja, er hat, ja.
Yes, he did, yes.

3 Med: Wie ist es dazu gekommen?
How did it happen?

4 DUS˘: Hoćeš iz početka, zašto si ti pošao, gde si pošao?
Tell it from the start, why did you want to go there and where?

5 BOG: Ja sam znac˘i pošao kod moje sestre da zamenim kljuc˘, razlog toga dolaska mog u vezi tog key was that he still had a key (?) and she was scared that he doesn’t get into the flat
Well, I got to my sister’s to change the key and the reason for my visit because of the

6 kljuca je zato, što je jedan ključ ostao kod njega (?) i ona se plašila, da on de dodje u stan with his key and causes her problems
key was that he still had a key (?) and she was scared that he doesn’t get into the flat

7 sa tim ključem, da joj ne pravi probleme
with his key and causes her problems

8 DUS˘: Also die die Herr Pichler und seine Schwester die sind auseinandergegangen und ihre Wohnung Well, the- the Mr Pichler and the sister of his they split up, and her flat
ist im vierten Bezirk und Wohnung von Herrn Pichler war im zwölften Bezirk. Aber Herr Pichler is in the fourth district and Mr Pichler’s flat was in the twelfth district. But Mr Pichler
hat Schlüssel gehabt (.) von ihre Wohnung. Und wenn die nicht mehr zusammenleben wollen, had key (.) to her flat. And if they don’t want to live together anymore,

11 von ihm. hh
oder wie es war wir wissen nicht genau, .hhh sie wollte- er war bei ihr vorher und er hat gestritten or we don’t know exactly. hhh she wanted- before, he was at her place and he was quarrelling

12 sie ist zur Polizei gegangen. sie hat Herrn Pichler angemeldet, die Schwester von .hhh
hhh and she went to the police, she registered Mr Pichler, his sister did. hhh

13 Med: Angezeigt, meinen Sie?
You mean, she reported him?

14 DUS˘: Angezeigt, bei der Polizei, daß er ihre Schlüssel zurückgibt. Und das war ein Sonntag, glaub Reported him to the police that he should give back her keys. That was on a Sunday, I
ich, oder es war am Abend, sie konnte den Schlüssel nicht kaufen und sie hat mich angerufen

und gefragt, ob sie- sie eine Schlüssel habe, und ich habe gesagt einen alten, aber ich weiß nicht, ob er funktioniert. Und sie ist gekommen, mein Mann hat es angeschaut, es war wirklich kaputt und hat gesagt, „ich zeige Dir, welche Seite Du gibst“. Also = was really broken and he said, “I show you, which side you put in.” I mean =

Mr Bogdić simply explains that he wanted to help his sister because she was afraid that Mr Pichler could come to her flat and cause trouble (5–7). What Mrs Duša in her translation makes out of that is quite another story, insofar as it brings it out of the dangerous realm of help from brother to sister, where it could be seen to support Mr Pichler’s interpretation of Balkan customs and family honour. She asserts in her ‘translation’ that the initiative of breaking up the relationship did not come from Mr Bogdić (8), and just a few sentences later actively demonstrates that she and her husband are not interested in the affairs of his sister (10/11). What is conspicuous about the way she presents the procedure of changing the lock is how circumstantially she describes a somewhat clear act in order to alter its symbolic meaning. Changing the lock in her version implicitly becomes an act of moral courage (protecting a woman against a violent ex-lover, 11/12), practical necessity (finding a lock on Sunday evening, 15–18) or men’s work (fixing a used lock with some technical particularities) and is brought away from the supposed determination of help within the family. It is obvious that she understood what Mr Pichler intended by his insinuation, and reacted to it. And she picked a pivotal point on which to concentrate her strategy.

Once again, the imputation of a deviant mentality opens up the possibility to redistribute guilt, tilting the perception of the conflict. Although it obviously was not about saving the sister’s virginity – she had been married previously to another Austrian man – Mr Pichler still used the cliché picture of Balkan customs to characterize their confrontation. This version is also disproved considering the unproblematic nature of Mr Bogdić’s friendship with his sister’s boyfriend, whom he had helped renovate his kitchen just a few days before that incident. But the supposed danger of brothers in affairs with women from the Balkans at least convinced the policemen, who charged Mr Bogdić for injury and did not account for the fact that Mr Pichler had previously encouraged his dog, a young rottweiler, to
chase him. The contextual circumstances of the two parties, their life and the conflict which became known during the mediation, suggested that Mr Pichler should be the one to be more concerned about inferences one could draw from his situation or a stigmatized identity – his criminal past – pointing to probable motives in the light. Nonetheless, Mrs Duša makes a big endeavour to explain the meaning of Mr Bogdić’s conduct. After she had given three completely plausible reasons, why her husband had to help his sister, she even added that it did not mean much expenditure to him, because her flat was only a tube station away (20/21).

Even more striking is that her defence is directed against their sense of family, which is one of the most common topics mentioned by immigrants regarding what distinguishes them from Austrians, who, as we often heard during fieldwork, ‘don’t spend enough time on their families.’ That she sees herself forced to reject their sense of family, which at the same time is part of their positive self-picture and self-esteem, indicates her being aware of the negative evaluation of this topic under the dominant discourse about ‘foreigners’. She has to accept that as the frame of reference in the mediation centre, and acts within it herself in order to be successful.

While Mrs Duša has to deny the ‘sense of family’ on the level of representations of themselves and their actions, on the level of a code of conduct she keeps it active as a normative orientation. In this regard, her strategy is double-tracked. Her honorific treatment of Mr Pichler reveals that she carefully adheres to the kind of relationship expected between members of a family during the whole mediation, and by acting according to these normative expectations, she is able to maintain her self-identity. Of course, in the mediation, neither she nor her husband could demand that Mr Pichler also followed this code of conduct.

Being forced to accept a certain version of discourse about ‘foreigners’ as the active emblematic framework in the mediation procedure means that immigrants also have to bear the predisposed effects of its conventionalized inner logic. It can be demonstrated in the differences in enacted social status observed throughout our cases – except only the mentioned Spiller vs Yunus. The reluctance of native parties to defend their own actions, instead of attacking their opponents’, already displays an imbalance in social power and prestige. The status difference can be demonstrated very clearly in the uneven distribution of face threatening acts, communicative moves that impinge on one’s own personal integrity, such as excuses, or the addressee, such as un concealed challenges, gross typifications of the other, offensive speech etc., and the way they are handled or negotiated. For example, immigrants often justify themselves for escalating a conflict by engaging the criminal courts, or try to establish that involving the police was not their own initiative, whereas natives never apologize for that (Gotsbachner, 1998, 1999). Even in a case like ‘Sense of Family’, Mr Pichler does not express regret for reporting Mr Bogdić to the police, although he was fully aware that this could have threatened his friend’s entire existence. During this mediation procedure, as in the other observed cases, there are numerous other indices for the gross
misbalance in the distribution of face threatening acts. Mr Pichler treats his friend very offensively, as if he was a complete stranger, whereas Mrs Dușa uses honorific address (8, 9, 12), and, as in lines 10/11, always tries to avoid, mitigate or conceal utterances or communicative acts, which Mr Pichler could interpret as personal insult.

As every successful mediation procedure has to end in a formal settlement where the parties stand up, shake hands and apologize for whatever was their part in the conflict, the way these excuses are offered are very telling. In none of the seven ‘successful’ cases we observed did the native parties ceremonially perform the excuse by saying they were sorry and show emotional empathy, as most immigrants did. They frequently even tried to avoid carrying out this formal act, even when they already had admitted their own guilty behaviour in the dispute, and in two cases had to be asked by the mediators to repeat it properly. In one case the Austrian party privately told me, he knew very well that he had started the fight and felt sorry about it, but he did not perform his excuse adequately, not even after the mediator requested it a second time (Gotsbachner, 1999). It was a matter of saving face and social prestige.

Now these apparent status differences call for an explanation, and it can be found in the discursive representations of ‘foreigners’, which provide the referential framework of the mediations. Tracing the apparent regularities in the observed cases, one can identify three levels on which they are influenced by the dominant discourse about ‘foreigners’: its emblematic structure, its inner dynamics and its preordained conclusion, which is the suspension of reciprocity in rights and entitlements producing such status differences. Here I can point out only a summary of what I have been demonstrating from the details of the transcripts given at length elsewhere (Gotsbachner, 1999).

At the level of emblematic structure, discourse about ‘foreigners’ enters the negotiations as different sets of social roles or identities that are available to immigrant or native parties. It is striking that native parties build their strategies on self-presentations as custodians of the social or legal order, ostentatiously behaving as if they were the ‘master in the house’, even in cases in which they are defendants and mainly their own misbehaviour has become thematized. Conversely, immigrants explain the deviant behaviour of native parties as considerate acts of a psychological state, which is only human (‘bad mood’). They generally do not try to usurp the law for themselves, addressing their opponents’ deviant mentality, as native parties regularly do. Another striking misdistribution of roles in the mediations is that immigrants are not able to use elements of their positive self-identification, such as ‘sense of family’, because from the official discursive background these are not evaluated in the same positive way. They are restricted to social roles compatible with their representations in discourse about ‘foreigners’. Mr Yunus, who built his self-portrait on a reflexive identity, successfully ‘opting out’ of the social categorization as immigrant, indicates a possibility to escape this logic, but even he did not challenge the evaluations in the dominant discourse themselves, and he hardly could.
The inner dynamics of discourse about ‘foreigners’ and the tendency to tilt can be revealed in action by considering differences of defensive efforts. Native parties act offensively, attacking alleged deviant behaviour of their immigrated opponents, sometimes even close to risking untrustworthiness. They do not strive to legitimize or reinterpret known elements of their social background which could disclose traits of their own stigmatized identities, such as a criminal past, alcoholism or enduring unemployment. In contrast, the tendency to tilt public perception immanent to discourse about ‘foreigners’ produces a permanent pressure on immigrants to legitimize their actions. Even when they act officially as victims in a case, they often try to explain and justify whatever might possibly be seen as their contribution leading to the conflict. They might lose the case, if they do not, as actually observed (Gotsbachner, 1999).

The litigation procedures in the mediation centre seem to take place on a slant, in a situation of uneven allocation concerning roles, status and argumentative chances, set by a conventionalized, but nonetheless xenophobic, version of discourse about ‘foreigners’. Notably, this influence can be demonstrated, even if openly xenophobic utterances are fully absent in the course of the mediation, banned by a powerful taboo. Discriminatory or racist language would certainly not be accepted by the mediators, who trustworthily express their sympathetic feelings towards immigrants and their problems, and surely could not be regarded as xenophobic. When we explained our research intentions at the beginning of contact, they maintained that there is no xenophobia to be observed in the mediation cases, and it is doubtful that they would have permitted us to watch and record these sensitive proceedings were they not completely convinced of their view. The xenophobic origin of the discourse about ‘foreigners’, which is observed in the meetings as their referential frame, and the effects of its inner logic and predisposed dynamics, obviously have become normal and for that invisible to the participants.

Conclusion

Tracing how xenophobic representations encroach upon everyday interaction means searching for the inconspicuous, because if discrimination were always exerted openly, where it is prone to challenge and criticism by other social actors, its effects possibly would be more limited. An inner logic observed in the emblematic construction and predisposed dynamics of discourse about ‘foreigners’ is here suggested as a central element securing the discriminatory impact through a variety of contexts, circumstances and social situations, while at the same time disguising it.

The infiltration of normalized discourse about ‘foreigners’ by a xenophobic inner logic and dynamics seems to build upon the ambivalence of its ‘master topics’, the various concepts of ‘cultural difference’ and ‘poor foreigners’. The process of ‘filling in’ social knowledge in topological ways of speaking is a common and necessary mechanism for all communication (Cicourel, 1972).
which provides for rehearsal, habitualization and stabilization of concepts, as well as for strategic manipulation and change.

Concepts, when experienced as “normal”, do not require an explicit definition. Paradoxically, this makes them all the more susceptible to conscious forms of manipulation (. . .) One result of this “flexibility” is that terms may acquire a contextual meaning which deviates considerably from the meaning which language users would take for granted, without the deviation being noticed.

(Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998)26

The ambivalence of the focal topics in talking about immigrants allows for constructive misunderstandings, in which social knowledge about the world, oneself and society unconsciously mixes with social knowledge, which is not regarded as close to one’s own experience, but as a kind of knowledge held only by others, yet still expected as ‘valid’ in certain social realms and situations. In such a way, discursive processes are central to the clandestine dispersion of ways of talking and their corresponding social perspectives.

The dynamic dimension of xenophobic discourse reveals a tendency to tilt, a predisposed discursive development directing conversations into paths which support a certain inner logic and pragmatic function. This discursive choreography of interpretative movements serves to maintain the preordained conclusion of discourse about ‘foreigners’: assigning immigrants to a subordinate social position and legitimizing discrimination with alleged traits of their cultural or ‘mental’ particularity. Everything positive, which can be said about immigrants, can be tilted into a negative perception through sometimes quite violent, sometimes only minor modifications of aspects mobilizing a xenophobic referential frame.

In detailed discussion of select transcripts from unelicited discursive events some regularities have been observed in how this aim is achieved in practice. By recategorizing facts, motives and meanings, xenophobic persons fit their narratives to an implicit schematic representation of immigrants organizing the reoccurring focal topics in a predisposed thematic direction. The imputation of immigrants’ deviant mentality and a specific understanding of ‘poor foreigners’ together are made to support the inner conclusion that immigrants threaten prosperity (cf. Wodak and Matouschek, 1993) and therefore have no claim to equal rights.

However, the employment of a xenophobic discursive dynamics is not confined to the ‘social knowledge’ items of xenophobic representations alone. Theoretically even more interesting are cases in which themes from emancipatory discourses or from immigrants’ own discourses about themselves are fed into xenophobic patterns of talk. The possibility for this extended operative sphere of a xenophobic discursive logic and dynamics seems to be already provided for in the topological organization of xenophobic discourse and its relation to other discourses.27 In various cases one could further demonstrate how using a predisposed dynamics of thematical progression speakers manage to preposterously espouse heterogeneous statements and social knowledge items. Although at first sight, it looks as if these persons would seriously consider arguments supporting...
the recognition of immigrants’ rights, in fitting them to the topological scheme of xenophobic discourse they implicitly subvert their prior meaning. This operation is central to the dynamics of discourse about ‘foreigners’ I called ‘tilting’, and its ability as a conventionalized argumentative resource for implicitly reframing and digesting competing discourses and ‘normalities’. ‘Mixed arguments’ arranged to the inner logic of xenophobic discourse are quite common, and although they have not attracted much scientific attention yet, they play an important role securing its discriminatory impact.

The cases we observed in small criminal case mediations revealed these covert discriminatory effects of normalized discourse about ‘foreigners’. Crucial elements of the topological ordering analysed in xenophobic talk influence the strategies and the dynamics in the negotiations by setting the frame of reference available to native and immigrated parties in their representations of self and other. It might be slightly exaggerated that ‘discourses create what it is possible to think by articulating different elements into a discursive formation at particular times’, as Woodward (1997: 255) claimed; but the common sense of dominant discourse clearly regulates the habitualized inner ‘logic’ of popular concepts and ideas in a sort of prototype effect. In interaction it regulates the themes, representations and items, which come to people’s minds first, when a certain topic is initiated or a certain role enunciated, or correspondingly, the recurrent themes and roles, which they orient to when thinking that because of their popularity or institutionalized adequacy they might come to the minds of the other participants in a conversation.

The focal topics in discourse about ‘foreigners’ are used by native parties in a variety of more or less subtle xenophobic forms, as a symbolic resource to characterize their immigrant opponents and the origins of their conflict. As the associations that these allusions to popular clichés trigger have to be calculated with in any successful counter-strategy, immigrants have to react to their preordained inner logic. In such a way, the concepts of normalized xenophobic discourses enter the common frame of reference in the dispute. The inner dynamics provided for in the dominant discourse, the tendency to tilt the perception of ‘foreigners’, constrains immigrant parties to precautiously justify themselves.

One aspect of identity politics is the symbolic struggle over legitimate naming, which constructs and establishes a semantic structure of differences. ‘Discourses and systems of representation construct places from which individuals can position themselves and from which they can speak.’ (Woodward, 1997: 14; cf. also McHoul and Grace, 1993). The question as to how immigrants maintain their feeling of self in a situation in which they have to orient to a cryptically xenophobic discursive framework, needs more differentiation. Only the recognizability and awareness of a certain set of ‘common sense’ might be shared socially, even if people, as shown in our case ‘Sense of Family’, keep an inner distance to it and have different, competing sets of such resources to represent their worldview. For immigrants, the mediation centre might be an inopportune place to try to bring their representations of self, as their lived experience, to bear. The inability to
promote elements of their feeling of identity in public is symptomatic for the unequal self-determination and availability of roles and status, which mirror their weak position in society.29

Xenophobic discourse is flexibly adaptable to a wide scale of situations when social actors make use of its strategic function of defending and legitimizing social hierarchies. Especially in changing social circumstances, such as the rise of a wealthy bourgeois class of immigrants, this function must be kept stable, even if basic assumptions and characterizations, on which the scheme is built, modify.30 The habitualization of its inner logic and the predisposed dynamics based on it thus play a crucial role in the perseverance of xenophobic ideology and its social effect. Throughout history basic concepts of xenophobic or racist discourse have changed, like the notion of ‘race’ itself, which, at least in Europe, has been replaced by a notion of cultural differences, and still their consequences are the same (van Dijk, 1984; Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). So, what had been observed in the discussion in which Mr Huber was confronted with Turkish immigrants, where his basic conceptualizations were defeated, and he still maintained his overall conclusion, also seems to happen on a wider social and historical plane. The inner logic and dynamics of discourse about ‘foreigners’ seems to have become a discursive element in its own right, influencing conventionalized forms of talking about immigrants. It is an important factor for their stability and dispersion among social milieus. As under the influence of an antiracist taboo xenophobic utterances mostly are implicit and unspoken, their habitualized forms, as discursive pattern of reoccurring thematical connections and dynamics, can be observed to successfully dodge their xenophobic origin. I have argued that it is more in this overall structure and habitualized dynamics of xenophobic discourse that its social function and the basis of its stability and dissemination can be revealed, than in studying their single types of utterances. Even when some of its assumptions or concepts may be refuted or proven wrong in confrontation with competing social representations, the inner organization and conclusion is maintained. Anti-hegemonial, anti-racist politics need to address this inner logic and dynamics directly in order to fight xenophobia effectively, especially in its normalized forms.

NOTES

1. Previous versions of this article were presented at the annual meeting of the Germany-based ‘Arbeitskreis Diskursanalyse’ in Augsburg on 30–31 March 2000, at the Sociolinguistics Symposium 27–29 April 2000 in Bristol, and at the Pragmatics Seminar of Prof. Werner Kallmeyer in Mannheim on 30 May 2000. For extensive comments on previous versions I am indebted to Julia Gillen, Frances Rock and Martin Reisigl. Thanks also to Anna de Fina, Ruth Wodak, Lies Sercu and Teun van Dijk.

2. While referring to a notion of discourse in the Foucaultian tradition (Foucault, 1973; McHoul and Grace, 1993; Diaz-Bone, 1999) throughout most of the text, attentive readers will find that in ‘discourse dynamics’ I use it in the more restricted sense, where it stands simply for spoken conversation. That dynamics of discourse in this restricted sense develops habitualized forms which draw upon discourse in the wider, sociological sense, will be one of my points.
3. The Austrian Ministry of Science commissioned and generously funded this study in a research focus on xenophobia. During 1997 10 months of fieldwork were carried out in Vienna by an interdisciplinary team of four researchers – me as political scientist, anthropologist Christine Hochsteiner, anthropologist/psychologist Jelena Tošić and sociologist Aslıhan Sanal also contributed their knowledge as Serbo-Croatian and Turkish native speakers. The choice of field locations – tenants meetings in houses in ‘problem’ areas, discussions in a community centre, in public parks or in pubs, cases heard in a mediation centre – was guided by the idea of identifying and recording the types of social interactions which the observed themselves found to be most crucial for the shaping of their senses of self and other.

4. In fact, I believe that some of the methodological issues currently discussed by sociolinguists have to be solved not so much by creating new tools of linguistic interpretation, but in refining the sociological design of the research processes from which the analysed texts are derived.

5. By tilting, I mean a more or less sudden change in presentation and perception. To illustrate this with a completely different example: it happens to medical students or young doctors that they collapse during a surgical operation, which is not due to physical exhaustion, but to an ‘aesthetic collapse’ of the referential frame. The medical–technical perception of the patient’s body, which students have acquired in training cannot be maintained, and they fall back into the ‘normal’ everyday perception, which suddenly shows a terribly wounded corpse. Even a minor modification of aspects can cause such a tilt brought about by a change in the frame, under which something is perceived.

6. An earlier passage, in which Mrs Friedl also arouses univocal consent, shows that even more clearly. ‘FRI: Well problems, I’ve to say, I don’t have problems, [because I don’t relate] to them, so I don’t have problems. FOR: [Me too] HUB: That’s it, right. SAB: Right FRI: Because they can’t (.) hmm adapt, they have their thing, even the ones who are born here, y’know . . .’ (Nbz 14.3.97: 213–9) ‘Thing’ here stands for ‘culture’, or rather ‘no culture’.

7. The term “Ausländer” (“foreigner” E.G.) is very often used as “synecdoche”, strictly speaking, as *totum pro parte* by which the seemingly all-inclusive anthroponymical nomination actually refers only selectively to very specific groups or persons.’ (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: 61). Similar phenomena of this use can be shown in many societies, as Steil (in Lengfeld, 1995) for Germany or Ann Dummett, *A Portrait of English Racism* (1973), to name but two.

8. (Nbz 14.3.97: 557–567) ‘Ch: Now let’s say, when you (.) go on travel you are foreigners as well? Aren’t you? HUB: Well that’s something different, [that’s tourists (.) I am tourist]= FRI: [We are guests, we bring our money there] HUB: =We bring our money there, because I don’t travel without money. .hhh but they, who come here, the tourists from the former eastern block. .hhh they mostly don’t have money, you can see it now, .hhh what the people-smugglers/ FRI: They live from our assets, practically. HUB: They live from our assets, yes. (3)’

9. (Ste.18.1.97: 80–85) ‘no, but there hospitality is guaranteed, because I pay ((short codeswitch emphasized standard German:)) Because I am a paying guest, no? (.) and more or less no parasite, let’s put it that way. That’s the point! Why do you think there are that much uuhm foreigners coming to Austria? Because they get money very easily. By the state (2)’

10. Statistically, it can be proved that on average immigrants in Vienna work more often as unskilled workers than natives while getting in total less salary, and that they live in...
flats which are equipped under average, for which they pay a rent higher than the usual (Bari et al., 1990).

11. Mr Huber answers that for this reason, most foreigners were janitors (!), ‘because in that way they don’t have to pay for their flat.’ Mrs Friedl replies with the generalized declaration: ‘And then they don’t even clean properly.(. . .)’cause in the night the Sirs have to watch video and then in the morning they oversleep.’

12. The figure is meant as an illustration, and only partially as a model, because, as such, it would have some weaknesses. These stem mainly from the fact that only the left side is derived inductively from observation in interaction, whereas the right-hand counterpart at some points has been supplemented from our sociological imagination. The common-sense knowledge items found for ‘fascinating plurality’ also might fit just as well into an exotic discourse, which hardly could be regarded as emancipatory.

13. This is a well-known mechanism of exclusion already studied in Elias and Scotson’s *Established and Outsiders* from 1965. For an historical account of the meaning of ‘suspect consumerism’ since the early 19th century, see also Orvar Lögren (1994) ‘Consuming Interests’, in Jonathan Friedman (ed.) *Consumption and Identity*, p. 50. Chur.

14. Although she puts it in a question, Mrs Friedl does not doubt the statistical fact that immigrants pay too much for their flats in comparison with native Viennese. Her epistemic stance expressed in the construction of her argument treats it as immigrants’ own view, but a true representation of reality.

15. Blommaert and Verschueren (1998: 25) come to a similar conclusion: ‘There is resistance discourse galore in the Belgian migrant debate, but it is hard to find any that is genuinely counter-hegemonic in the sense that it would deny or question the fundamental assumptions, ideas and beliefs that characterize the hegemonic version.’

16. ‘All discourse can be considered to be not only dialogically, but rhetorically organized with regard to actual or potential alternatives.’ (Edwards, 1997: 78)

17. The ambivalence of the ‘master-topics’ in talk about foreigners helps to blur such ideological dilemmas in discursive practices, by enabling the use of social knowledge items from one scheme within the frame of another without risking a reproach of inconsistency. If xenophobic participants would use social knowledge items from the emancipatory scheme without that opportunity at all, must be in doubt. Our data reveal a significant preponderance of the subverting use, like ‘social weakness’ in the ‘janitor gossip’ story (10, 12), in which ‘hard working’ (7) was also the only positive reference to immigrants during the entire discussion.

18. In legal anthropology, this criterion is used to distinguish normative from non-normative expectations for a definition of norms and law, which tries to escape etatistic presuppositions. Normativity there is also seen not so much as a matter of statutes and more as one of adequate procedure (cf. Gotsbachner, 1995).

19. In fact the encounter was not definitely ‘naturally occurring’, because my colleague had asked Mr Huber to accompany her, and he accepted, because he sees himself being on good terms with immigrants. It is difficult to summarize 3 hours’ very vivid discussion, full of witty remarks, sudden turns and dramatic developments, which hardly can be left out without losing the whole character of it. But the basic position Mr Huber defended successfully was that immigrants in general and the other participants in particular could claim equal rights only if they gained Austrian citizenship and fully adapted to what he defined to be local culture. The theme they finally turned to in partial agreement was that immigrants, who ‘adapt’, have an easier life, which after the previous heated discussions about reciprocity and equal rights was somewhat like a giving-in to the point that immigrants are responsible for their discrimination, if they don’t. See in full Gotsbachner (1998).

21. The threat coming from brothers is a popular understanding regarding affairs with women from ‘the south’. My colleague reported that when she revealed being Turkish while flirting with Austrian men, she frequently was asked, if her brothers were around.

22. See next note.

23. Only in personal conversation with Mr Pichler, after the mediators had left the room, is she able to thematicize their sense of family. She declares that Mr Bogdčič’s sister is ‘such a type of woman who feels dragged towards her family’ (ATA 17.6.97: 817) and ‘Our mentality is different, but this does not mean that we interfere. When we visit each other. My brother comes every second, third day as well.’ (ATA 17.6.97: 808/9). Mr Bogdčič even requests that Mr Pichler should act like a person related to the family: ‘You and Mezzi always say, “Besim, why don’t you come to have a coffee at the petrol station.” Why don’t you say, “Besim, come, we have a coffee at home. Besim, you come with me.”’ (ATA 17.6.97: 819–821).

24. ATA 16.7.97: 520–24 ‘PIC: . . . I knew, when he hits me and I don’t stand up again, everything is finished for him anyhow’ and addressing Mr Bogdčič in 541, to point out his ‘generosity’ after the settlement: ‘PIC: . . . there is deportation, Beso, there is deportation for injury!’ In contrast Mrs Dusu apologizes and asserts that they did not know they had made a report when they went to the police to justify themselves, even when their case of injury and destruction of a leather jacket was not followed further.

25. Being seen as xenophobic also would severely endanger the success of native parties’ strategies, strongly evoking this as having been a main cause of the conflict.

26. I cite this beautiful expression although I am somewhat sceptical of how Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) reach their empirical findings.

27. Foucault called that ‘rules of correlation’ (McHoul and Grace, 1993: 44).

28. Prototypes are central to cognitive processes of classification, enabling the allocation of attributes. Their role in the organization of cognition, perception and the regulation of spontaneous mental associations has been studied by Battig and Montague or Rosch in their classical studies (Taylor, 1989). Note that in the social realm this fits closely to what Sacks (1992) said about ‘membership categorisation devices’ and ‘category bound activities’.

29. The danger of a possible conviction in court makes them even more vulnerable to the emblematic logic of social profiles as sedimented in dominant discourse. The final outcome of one of the mentioned unsuccessful cases (Gotsbachner, 1999) shows that even in a criminal court the mechanisms of identity politics, which decide over the plausibility of participants presentations, are not that different there.

30. In fact, the rising class of these successful and well-off immigrants in Western Europe is often regarded as the challenge to institutionalized forms of discrimination, which the dominant groups react to by more open forms of xenophobia, vigorously defending established social borders (Freyberg, 1994).

BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION NOTATION

I use a slightly modified version of the notation described in Schenkein (1978: XI–XVI). All names are anonymized. The Viennese idiom of the original transcript necessarily is lost in the English translation. Serbian language utterances are made recognizable by a different font.

( . ) micropause (< 1 sec.) hhh hearable aspiration
( 3 ) pause 3 sec. .hhh hearable in-breath
Ja( ) lengthening of the preceding sound ((stands up)) non-acoustic event or describer’s comment
( ? ) question marks uncertain hearings
( ? ? ...) (? ? ...) uncertain hearings
A: .... [...] simultaneous utterances, left 
B: [.....] right brackets onset, right brackets resolution
= latching in contiguous utterances ich ha’ abrupt cutoff

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