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Establishing believability in interviews

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Establishing believability in interviews¹

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Abstract

Establishing positive social relations with those one wishes to work is an important part of what anthropologists do while in the field. Interviews are one type of common communicative event used in fieldwork, but their relationship to building rapport isn't well understood. Part of the reason for this is that interviews are often treated as sites for obtaining information, rather than another site where interpersonal relationships are built between researcher and consultant. This paper explores the relationship between content and context in interviews by focusing on the interactional moves of a consultant in his efforts to position his accounts of his leadership practices as believable. My empirical focus will be an interview recorded as part of fieldwork I carried out in 2003-2004 in Indonesia. In looking at this data I will argue that this interview provides one section head, Ismail, the opportunity to self-praise in a way that in other contexts is quite inappropriate. I link this self-promotion with wider circulating negative discourses about bureaucrats by showing how he positions himself as inhabiting a persona that is nothing like those represented in these discourses. In doing so, I demonstrate how Ismail made these accounts believable through his use of represented speech.

Keywords: Interviews; believability; interaction; Indonesia

Introduction

In late August 2003 I arrived in Indonesia with a plan to continue my research on interaction amongst those from diverse backgrounds (Author, 2000), although rather than neighborhoods I wanted to focus on language practices in a government office setting. As I found in my PhD work (Author, 2000), local circumstances required some massaging of my topic. When I initially arrived in Semarang, some of my old colleagues at Diponegoro University suggested a particular government office as a research site because they had some acquaintances there. Through this network I was then able to get access to this office which I will call the Public Administration Office, and by mid-September I had permission from a number of department heads to hang around and ask questions, typically of those who seemed to be assigned to talking to me whenever I arrived. During the first month or so I observed interactions and talked to as many people in the office as I could in three departments. By late October I had become increasingly drawn to one department and its head, Ismail, because of my mistaken belief that he was an ethnic outsider and then later through his interactions with his staff, which contrasted with what I knew about Javanese use and how it related to interactional hierarchies.

By November I felt it was time to move beyond casual conversations and observations of Ismail's interactions with his staff and so I sought to record an interview with Ismail about language in the office. In this interview Ismail spent much of his time talking about his leadership practices and in positioning himself as an exemplar of good leadership. Although I was drawn to Ismail because of his regular exchanges of familiar *ngoko* Javanese with his staff, I was also perplexed by his proclivity to self-praise. One of the lessons that stood out for me during my three years stay in Indonesia between 1992 and 1998 was that self-praise was something that was considered inappropriate in many contexts. In the Semarang neighborhood and Cirebon village where I had spent most of my time, it was common to hear

people talking negatively about others who engaged in this sort of talk, often referring to them as *sombong* “arrogant” or *gedhé rasa (gr)* “having a high opinion of oneself”. The need not to be arrogant was also regularly the topic of sermons at Friday prayers, Thursday evening Al Quran recitations, and other religious settings. In 2003 similar themes could be regularly found in the local newspaper (*Suara Merdeka*) with headlines and stories like the two excerpts below.

Excerpt 1 It is hoped that superiors don't act like they are better than others (8/7/2003)

Sekretaris Daerah Wonogiri Drs H Triwibowo MM mengatakan, figur pejabat sebagai aparatur pemerintah dan pemimpin masyarakat, hendaknya jangan sampai bersikap kemlinthi (banyak tingkah-Red).... "Dengan memiliki kesadaran itu, kita akan merasa kecil dan akan terjauhkan dari sikap keangkuhan, kecongkakan, dan kesombongan," katanya.

The Wonogiri District Secretary, Drs. H. Triwibowo MM, said “that leadership figures as government workers and leaders of the people, it was hoped that they don't act like they are better than others”....With an understanding [about where we have come from] we will feel small and will distance ourselves from conceit, snootiness, and arrogance,” he said.

(Anonymous 2003e)

Excerpt 2 Future leaders shouldn't be arrogant superiors (21/10/2003)

"Pemimpin mendatang jangan yang bergaya juragan apalagi arogan," kata Menhub Agum Gumelar se usai menutup Pendidikan Dasar Kedisiplinan dan Kepemimpinan bagi SMU Taruna Nusantara Magelang, Sabtu (25/10)

“Future leaders don't be like a superior or worse an arrogant [superior]” said the minister for infrastructure Agum Gumelar when he closed the basic leadership and discipline [forum] for the Taruna Nusantara

lalu.

senior high school in Magelang last Saturday
25/10/2003.

(Anonymous 2003c)

Work on interviews has provided some useful starting points for interpreting Ismail's proclivity to present himself in the way that he did. The main thrust of this recent work echoes many of Briggs' (1986) earlier observations about interviews and revolve around the importance of seeing interviews as not merely providing content (i.e. data to be uncritically believed), but as an interaction to be analyzed and one that has complex relationships with wider circulating discourses, while also being embedded in a history of interactions (Briggs 1986; 2007; De Fina 2011; De Fina 2013; De Fina and Perrino 2011; Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Koven 2014; Modan and Shuman 2011; Slembrouck 2011; Wortham, et al. 2011). As an interaction, interviewees are seen as participants who have their own agenda too and often take positions in interviews in relation to the broader social situation, including more widely circulating discourses about people like themselves. In order to pursue these agendas, interviewees' often use a whole host of conversational features. In some events this practice closely resembles the type of performance reported in work on narrative (Bauman 1975; Bauman 1986; Bauman 2004; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Briggs 1986).

Performance in narrative or storytelling is tied to two interdependent dimensions, tellability and tellership (Ochs and Capps 2001). Tellability relates to the fine line between being truthful and being entertaining, while tellership relates to the extent that others become involved in telling a story. In the context of interviews, story-telling performances also seem to be part of wider efforts, on the part of the interviewee, to establish their reports as believable. In this paper I align with the view of "interview as interaction approach" to show how believability is achieved in interviews. This view of "interview as interaction" and the

importance of understanding its relationship to complex contexts also aligns with more general work in the broad field of language and political economy (e.g. Blommaert 2010; Gal 1989; Heller 2011; Heller 2013; Heller and Duchêne 2012), which invites us to incorporate a perspective on political economy in the interpretation of interactional data.

In taking up these invitations, I start by further exploring the notion of truth or believability in interviews, before then taking a look at bureaucracy in Indonesia, and the period of turmoil that ensued from roughly 1997 to the time of my fieldwork in 2003. One of the things that stand out in this period is a heightened, and mostly negative, focus on civil servants. After looking at these discourses of bureaucratic personhood, I move on to show how Ismail draws upon both historical developments and these widely circulating discourses about bureaucratic personhood to construct his story as believable. In pointing out how my presence in the office context as well as the interviews I conducted afforded Ismail opportunities to position himself as an exemplar of good governance; a paradigm that had increasingly become part of circulating discourses after the economic crisis of 1997 and regime change in 1998. In doing so, I argue that believability is enhanced through performances of his interaction with staff, which typically take the form of represented speech.

Establishing believability in interviews

Anthropology has a long history of providing insights into how to establish positive social relations with those one wishes to work. The standard stock of advice offered in textbooks on doing ethnography point to the need to establish mutual rapport or trust between researcher and consultants (e.g. Agar 1996; LeCompte and Schensul 1999; Spradley 1979; Wolcott 2001). As one of a long series of communicative events that are part of ethnographic fieldwork, interviews afford an opportunity to build rapport, which includes trust in the

information given by all parties. Even so, work on the methodological issues associated with interviews tell us that, interviews are more often than not treated as sites for obtaining information, rather than sites where trust is built between researcher and consultant as part of the interactional context of interviews (Briggs 1986; Briggs 2007; De Fina and Perrino 2011; 2014). This is strange because much of the interaction that occurs in interviews is akin to conversational story-telling or narrative, which is widely acknowledged as a site where people build and maintain rapport as they try to understand themselves, others, and events in their lives (De Fina 2003; Georgakopoulou 2007; Ochs and Capps 2001; Tannen 1989).

A further look into work on narrative also highlights another dimension to rapport or trust, namely the tensions between making a story tellable and making a story believable (Ochs and Capps 2001). To make a story tellable (tellability) requires the teller to secure an audience and/or co-tellers. Most people are not exemplary story-tellers of the type described in Bauman (1986; 2004), and at times they may struggle to secure an audience and/or co-tellers. As part of the ethnographic enterprise, interviews provide an audience to tellers who in other contexts may struggle to get an audience (e.g. Agar 1996; Modan and Shuman 2011). While the stories told in interviews may not be told by famous storytellers who routinely stretch the limits of believability (Bauman 1986; Bauman 2004), the practice of conversational storytelling has moral dimensions and regularly involves some form of embellishment, often just enough to keep those involved interested (and in some cases to become co-tellers), while keeping the story believable (Ochs and Capps 2001).

The moral dimensions of a story or storylike events typically relate to accounts of the appropriateness or inappropriateness of demeanors and actions of others, and involve talk that helps position the teller(s) as exemplars of some moral order and those talked about as socially deviant (e.g. Besnier 2009; Briggs 1996; De Fina 2013; Modan and Shuman 2011; Ochs and Capps 2001). Interview contexts afford interviewees opportunities to talk about

topics that are not commonly talked about and/or position themselves as certain types of people to achieve certain goals, such as convincing a researcher about their prowess in a certain activity or their moral sensibilities in relation to other events or discourses (De Fina 2003; Modan and Shuman 2011; Slembrouck 2011; Wortham, et al. 2011). This interactional work can be done in talk that involves orientation information (who, when, where), as pointed out by Modan and Suman (2011), or through some sort of performance of the event that is reported in the story, especially performances of how those in the story spoke and acted (Ochs and Capps 2001; Tannen 1989).

These types of performances, often referred to as reported talk, constructed dialogue, and represented speech (Agha 2007a; Clift and Holt 2007; Tannen 1989; Tannen 1995), are well-studied in Javanese speaking Indonesia (e.g. Berman 1998; Errington 1998b; Goebel 2010), with some claiming that this type of talk often presents past events quite accurately (e.g. Keeler 1987). More generally, the literature suggests that this type of talk is typically a performance where the actions and talk of the characters in the story are embellished. Just as importantly, this type of talk creates cross-chronotype alignments (Agha 2007b; Perrino 2007; Perrino 2011; Silverstein 2005). Cross-chronotype alignment is the situation where the the then-and-there of the story in comparison to the here-and-now of the ongoing story-telling event are temporarily brought into the same timespace. Bringing about such alignments through the use of represented speech can also create a sense of authenticity to the story by turning those in the storytelling event into participants of one kind or another in the narrated event. In this case, cross-chronotope alignment adds believability to a story by making the audience a type of witness to the event being narrated.

There are many semiotic forms that tellers use to indicate represented talk, including the use of temporal markers, third person forms of reference, first and second person pronouns, language alternation, and so on (e.g. Bauman 2004; Clift 2006; Clift and Holt

2007; Georgakopoulou 2007; Ochs and Capps 2001; Tannen 1989). Language alternation and codeswitching have received a lot of attention, not least because of some of the unwanted assumptions that go with “code” and “language” (Auer 1998; Blackledge and Creese 2014; Blommaert 2010; Gafaranga 2007; Heller 1988; Heller 2007; Jørgensen, et al. 2011; Milroy and Muysken 1995; Pennycook and Otsuji 2015). What seems common in some of this work, and in more recent work on language and political economy, and enregisterment (e.g. Agha 2007a; Heller 2011; Heller, et al. In press; Kelly-Holmes and Mautner 2010; Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2013), is that to understand any type of language practice we need to understand its relationship with categories that have emerged through the linking of communicative practices and ideas about personhood and social relations in larger one-to-many participation frameworks (e.g. schools, the mass media). In the case of Indonesia, where part of nation-building activities and diversity management have helped distinguish the national language, Indonesian, from local languages, terms such as language and code are useful starting points for understanding situated practice (e.g. Goebel 2010; 2015).

Indonesia

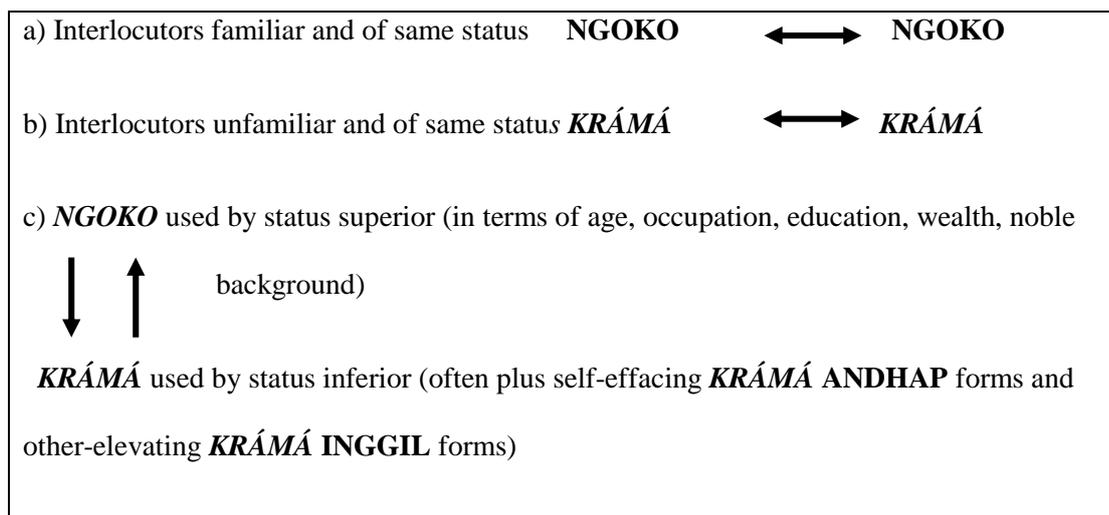
Indonesia is an archipelago nation made up of more than 18,000 islands (Cribb and Ford 2009). Depending on who is counting and how language is defined there are between 400-1000 languages in Indonesia (e.g. Abas 1987; Dardjowidjojo 1998; Sneddon 2003). In general, many of Indonesia’s 250 million people have competence to use or at least comprehend two or more languages. Of importance for this paper are Indonesian, the national language, and a local variety of Javanese. Indonesian in its many varieties has become the stereotypical language of education, government, citizenship (Errington 1998a; Errington 1998b), and the language for doing unity in diversity (Goebel 2013; Goebel 2015).

While the process of creating Indonesian had its antecedents in the Dutch colonial period (Errington 1998a; Errington 2000), the period from 1968 was especially important in the development of this ideology. This is so because of massive investments in important standardizing one-to-many participation frameworks, such as schooling, radio, television, and language policy (Bjork 2005; Dick 2002; Kitley 2000; Nishimura 1995; Parker 2002; Thee Kian Wie 2002). Through circulation in these frameworks Indonesian has become indexed to these frameworks and ideologies associated with these frameworks. For example, Indonesian has become the language of authority and the language of an Indonesian public (Errington 1995; Errington 1998a; Errington 1998b; Errington 2000).

Indonesian sits in contrast to local vernacular varieties of Indonesian and regional languages, which have stereotypical relationships with intimate social relations. Some regional languages, such as Javanese, have both standardized and localized variants and these variants also have stereotypical relationships with the intimate social relations and less-intimate public relations. Errington (1995), for example, has pointed out that in rural Java in the 1980s *krámá* or *básá* variants of Javanese became associated with a social distant co-ethnic public. In addition, with its vocabulary of around one thousand words, *básá* has also been described as the language used among strangers (e.g. Bax 1974; Errington 1985; Smith-Hefner 1983; Wolff and Poedjosoedarmo 1982), the language of formal speeches and ceremony, the language of conversation amongst or to nobility (e.g. Errington 1985; Errington 1988; Wolff and Poedjosoedarmo 1982), and the language which presupposes a different type of social relationship than inferred by the use of another variant, *ngoko* (e.g. Errington 1998b). Among other things, *ngoko* has been described as the language of the self, thought, and as the language used among family and friends (e.g. Bax 1974; Errington 1985; Errington 1998b; Smith-Hefner 1983; Wolff and Poedjosoedarmo 1982).

Diagram 1 provides a picture of how *krámá* and *ngoko* forms are exchanged. There are three main ways, including the symmetrical exchanges shown in a) and b), and the asymmetrical exchanges in c). In this paper I will primarily focus on the alternation between Indonesian and the *ngoko* variant of Javanese, although it is important to keep in mind the possibilities of symmetrical and asymmetrical exchange. Before moving to my analysis of interview talk, I will turn my attention to ideologies about leadership and researching bureaucrat life-worlds in Indonesia to give a sense of the types of discourses that circulated during the time of my fieldwork.

Diagram 1 *Patterns of Javanese exchange*



Ideologies of leadership

Wolff and Poedjosoedarmo (1982: 61-62) and Errington's (1998b: 75-80) both provide brief introductions to talk in the Indonesian bureaucracy in the mid-1970s and mid-1980s respectively. Errington's work is of more relevance here because he focuses on a form of leadership talk by examining a village head's introduction to a meeting. In line with Seigel's (1986) and Anderson's (1990) observations about Javanese usage, Errington points out that this type of talk is locally valued as exemplary because it is in *krámá* and does not directly

praise the speakers endeavours. With the exception of this work, there is little else on leadership talk in the bureaucracy. Even so, there are other ethnographies on leadership which offer some further insights (e.g. Antlöv 1994; Antlöv and Cederroth 1994; Keeler 1985). Like Errington, these studies are carried out in the rural peripheries of Java rather than the urban centres. In the following sections we will see that some of the findings of these studies resonate with Ismail's philosophies about leadership.

Scholarship on leadership in Java suggests that there are five types of leaders and leadership practices, though typically they are not mutually exclusive. A common theme is the link between power and leadership and the idea that if a leader needs to demonstrate power or explicitly give directions, then this is a sign of powerlessness and inability to lead. Of particular relevance here are three types of practices. The first is where leadership practice is characterized as a benovelent leader who buys loyalty in patron-client relations. In this case, leaders' directions are followed because of prior or promised financial help and the more general generosity of a leader in their dealings with members of a particular community (Antlöv 1994). The second type of leadership practice came to prominence during the 1966-1998 period, known as the New Order period, through the spread of the state-sanctioned ideology (*Pancasila*), which was taught in schools and implemented as training for bureaucrats (Mulder 1994). This ideology built upon long-standing reverence for old-age, parents, and religious teachers whereby children and other novices had a moral and religious obligation to be obedient and follow advice and directions of those who are older (Mulder 1994: 59-60). Within the school and university system this type of formalized socialization occurred in compulsory citizenship classes locally referred to as PMP "Pancasila moral education" (Mulder 1994: 60-63; Nishimura 1995: 29).

During the New Order period leaders were known for their ability to give *perintah halus* (Antlöv 1995: 8), which is literally "refined and polite directives" where the "refined"

aspect refers to a type of “indirect or off-the record utterance” and the “polite” refers to the use of a *krámá* variety of Javanese (described in the previous section). While Ismail, the central figure in this paper, was a participant in this type of civics education, his fifteen years living in Kalimantan with his parents who were government officials, did not give him exposure to or occasion to become competent in performing the type of exemplary Javanese reported above.

Researching bureaucratic life-worlds in a period of change

My data was gathered during fieldwork carried out from September 2003 until February 2004 in a government department within Central Java’s provincial bureau of regional autonomy. The bureau was located in Semarang, the capital city of Central Java. In addition to visiting this office a few times per week during the last hour of work, I also attended three office meetings, a number of inter-governmental forums, and a farewell party for Ismail. In total I made five-and-a-half hours of audio-video recordings of meetings and I recorded ten hours of interviews. After making these recordings I needed to transcribe and indicate on the transcript which language was which. This was done using information from a number of local Indonesian research assistants, Javanese and Indonesian dictionaries, my own knowledge of Javanese and Indonesian, and post-recording interviews with participants using transcripts of talk from the two recorded meetings as stimulus for discussions about language usage.

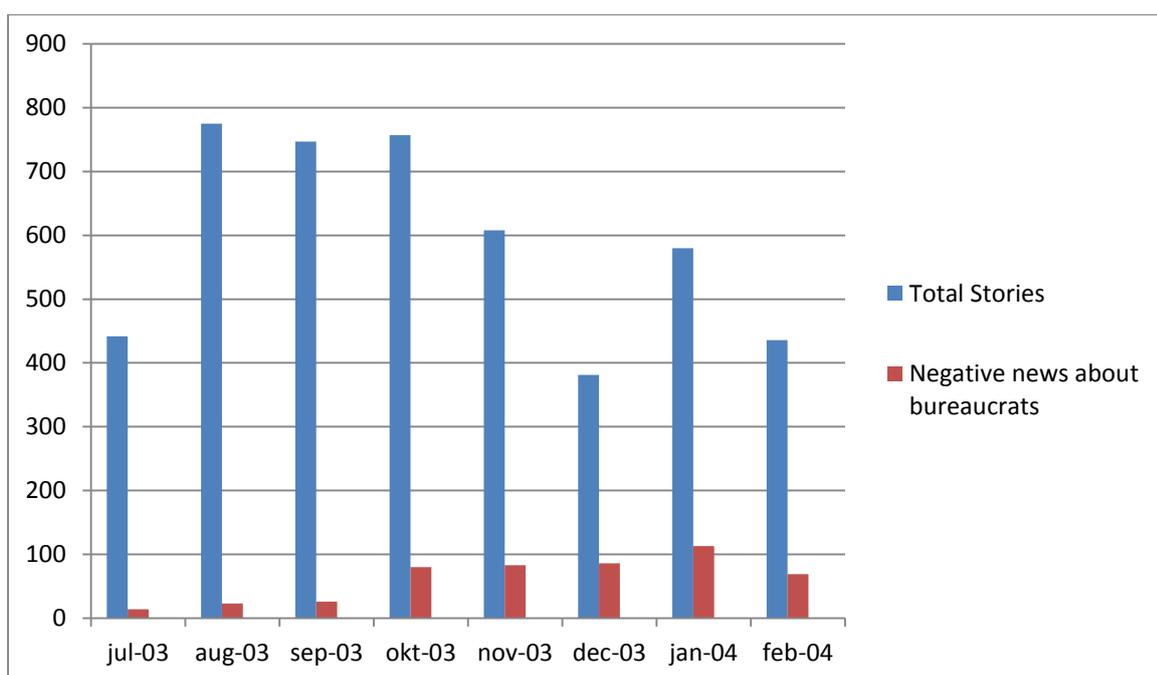
While I was well aware that establishing relationships in this office over a short period would prove more difficult than in the neighborhoods I had previously worked (Author, 2010), the task of establishing rapport was also further complicated by a fear that I might be there to investigate corruption instead of researching language use. This point was hammered home to me during the first meeting I attended in November 2003 (Author, 2014). On this occasion Ismail started the meeting by noting that he was convinced that all I was there to do

was to research language use and nothing else. Such fears are understandable in the context of the major changes that beset bureaucrats' life worlds from 1998 onwards. Indonesian civil servant (*pegawai negeri*) wages have been historically so low that receiving tips or payment for services (*suap*) has become a widespread and recognized way for supplementing income. During the Soeharto period, 1965–1998 this practice was commonly censored from public discussion because of civil servants political value as members of the government party, GOLKAR. However, since 1998 media censorship has been lifted and has accompanied a rapid democratization process (Aspinall and Fealy 2003), and increasing calls for good governance from local and global actors (e.g. the papers in Lindsey and Dick 2002).

The political and fiscal decentralization that started in 2001 (Aspinall and Fealy 2003) also had a number of other impacts on civil servants. On the one hand, decentralization reduced the need for large numbers of civil servants working in the central government (Colongon 2003; Rohdewohld 2003). At the time, civil servants could not be retrenched so the solution was to transfer over seventy percent of the 2.7 million civil servants working in central government offices in Jakarta and the provincial capitals to district offices throughout Indonesia (Colongon 2003; Rohdewohld 2003). In addition to the uncertainty this created for these civil servants in terms of what type of job they would have once back in their home district, there were increasing pressures on civil servants to be more responsive, efficient, and corruption-free as a succession of new Indonesian governments attempted to embrace ideas of democracy and good governance (e.g. Firman 2008; Lindsey and Dick 2002; McLeod and MacIntyre 2007; Rohdewohld 2003; Synnerstrom 2007; Tjiptoherijanto 2008). For example, a 2002 report to the cabinet by the State Minister for Administrative Reform listed corruption, inefficient and ineffective mechanisms, and lack of structured supervision and accountability procedures as serious shortcomings (Rohdewohld 2003: 265).

Thinking about these issues was underpinned not just by outside pressures from aid agencies, but arguably also by some of the new emerging political parties who made bureaucratic accountability and corruption an election issue (Tomsa 2012). During the election campaign that started in 2003, these issues also became very prominent in the local and national newspaper media. To get some sense of just how often these ideas were repeated in the local public sphere during the period of my fieldwork we can look at the on-line front page stories of the Semarang based newspaper, *Suara Merdeka* “Voice of Freedom”, which according to one source, has over 100,000 subscribers (Ririn Risnawati and Sri Syamsiyah Lestari Sjaifiie 2012: 285). With the help of a research assistant we browsed the front pages of a few thousand on-line stories from *Suara Merdeka* in 2013 and downloaded those that were about the bureaucracy and corruption. Diagram 2 illustrates a quantitative view of the number of negative stories about bureaucrats relative to other stories. It needs to be kept in mind that these stories were online stories, so their content may have differed to the broadsheet version, something that requires me to do some further archival research.

Diagram 2 *Online newspaper representations of bureaucratic personhood*



Many of these stories repeated the themes about bureaucratic personhood found in the 2002 reports submitted by the Ministry of Administrative Reform. For example, there were regular headlines and stories about corruption and lack of accountability procedures: “There are those who will pay 100 million for their Area Secretary position” (Anonymous 2003a), “The bitter story of the Regent of Kebumen” (Anonymous 2003d), and “Most corruption is done by public service bosses” (Dunn and Lindblom 2003). There were also many stories about inefficient and ineffective processes, including “Bureaucrats need to have an entrepreneurial spirit” (Anonymous 2003b), “The people are asked to monitor the district official’s efficiency” (Anonymous 2003f), and “Bureaucrats’ discipline is a problem for the Governor” (Amirudin 2003). Many of the themes found in these newspaper reports resonated with Ismail’s presentation of his practices as a leader in my interviews with him.

The interview I focus on below was the first interview that I recorded with Ismail. I made this recording in early November 2003, just before three in the afternoon, and after I had been hanging around the office for about an hour listening to and observing conversational interactions. While these observations provided me with some questions about language use that I wanted to ask Ismail, I only got to ask these late in the interview. There were a number of features of Ismail’s talk that struck me as rather different to the interviews about language in the office that I had conducted with two other head of departments and most of Ismail’s staff in the months prior to this interview. First, Ismail regularly emphasised his practices as exemplary leadership practices. As noted in the introduction to this paper, typically this type of self-praise would normally be seen as socially inappropriate. Typically, Ismail self-praised in the orienting part of his stories where he would tell me who was involved, where and when it occurred. Second, and related to this, his self-praise related to

his exemplary-ness as a leader, and this resonated with the type of discourses described in the previous section, which focused on not so exemplary bureaucrat practices.

Third, Ismail regularly represented his interactions with staff as a way of emphasizing his exemplary practices. In doing so, he was able to increase the believability of his accounts by bringing me into the context being reported as if I was there witnessing the event. Fourth, Ismail's reports and performances of his language practices contrasted remarkably with how others talked about language and social relations in the office. For example, while other heads pointed out that relationships with staff were always hierarchical and required the type of asymmetrical exchanges of Javanese found c) in diagram 1, Ismail pointed to how he inverted this relationship, while also regularly using the type of symmetrical exchanges found in a) in diagram 1. Ismail's reports and performances of his practices also contrasted with his contemporaries in the area of reference. For example, the two other heads referred to their charges in my interviews with them as staf "staff", while Ismail referred to them as *teman teman* "friends".

Becoming a witness to exemplary leadership practices

Excerpt 1 represented Ismail's response to my first question, which I formulated on the fly. This question was formulated after Ismail noted that it was easy to be a boss, but harder to be a leader and after he pointed out that he aspired to be a leader and that his success at this would be exemplified in his staff's tears when he moved elsewhere where his new staff would eagerly be awaiting him. The import of this excerpt is how Ismail self-praises, while reporting interaction with his staff as a way of increasing the believability of his accounts.

Excerpt 1 I mentor my staff and hold meetings, something not often done by others

Researcher

- 1 heeh . terus kalau di sini juga menyiapkan Yes. And is there preparation here, for
2 misalnya . yang . jadi kepala subab . example, [for] those who become a
3 subag . >maksudnya kan> sudah kasih section head, a section head? What I
4 contoh contoh yang baik . bagaimana jadi mean, is they have already been provided
5 pemimpin baik gitu ya . terus . jadi . with good models on how to become a
6 sekalian . apa ini kan . sekalian good leader, right. And at the same time
7 maksudnya kan . a: kasih pelajaran = given lessons

Ismail

- 9 = iya Yes [go on].
10 =

Researcher

- 11 = gitu . ya supaya mempersiapkan mereka Right, so that they are prepared. For
12 jadi . misalnya ada yang . niatnya mau example, there is someone who wants to
13 jadi kepala . be a head

Ismail

- 14 ya . Yes [go on].

Researcher

- 15 ini kan @bisa gitu@ . Right, they can, you know.

Ismail

- 16 @iya@ . kaderisasi . Yes. Training.

Researcher

17 heem . OK.

Ismail

18 dan saya menyiapkan kaderisasi sudah And I prepare [them] for the third level
19 lapis ketiga (3.0) kapanpun saya pindah [of management]. Whenever I leave from
20 dari sini . saya sudah punya calon here I will already have a replacement
21 pengganti dari satu di antara tiga kasubag candidate, from, one from amongst the
22 (5.0) jadi tiga kasubag di asisten staf . itu three sub-section heads. So that the three
23 sudah ada penggantinya semua . itu sudah sub-section heads [also] have
24 saya siapin . replacements from their staff. I have
already prepared for this.

Me

25 he em he em he em . Yes, yes, yes.

Ismail

26 dan itu prosesnya a penyiapan itu tidak And that process, um, of preparation is
27 secara khusus . tapi sambil sambil jalan not done formally, but while, while [we]
28 proses . dengan lemparan lemparan work, [I] give out tasks “please get **this**
29 pekerjaan . **iki** tolong dirampungi . **iki** done, please finish **this**”
30 tolong selesaikan =

Ismail

31 pada saat dia melaksanakan itu sering During the time he/she does these [tasks] I
32 saya mengadakan rapat staf. itu juga often hold a staff meeting, [something]
33 jarang dilakukan birokrat . saya rapat staf which is rarely done by bureaucrats, I

34 itu hampir dua minggu sekali . hold a staff meeting almost every two weeks.

Me

35 he e:m . Yes.

Ismail

36 meting staf . khusus bagian saya = A staff meeting, specifically for my section.

The talk in excerpt 1 represents the start of a series of self-praise sequences, which contrasts with widely circulating ideas about the presentation of self. In excerpt 1 Ismail positions his practices and thus himself as exemplary through his report of holding staff meetings every two weeks, something that he suggests is rare among his colleagues (lines 32-33). In stating the obvious, it is my line of questioning that affords Ismail the opportunity to engage in this type of self-promotion. My line of questioning also provides Ismail an opportunity to position his practices in relation to wider ministerial discourses about bureaucratic reform noted in the previous section, especially the need for training. What is interesting here is how Ismail goes about convincing me that he actually engages in mentoring. In this case, and in subsequent excerpts we see that Ismail supports his claims of mentoring through the use of represented speech (lines 29-30). In doing so, Ismail brings me into this past event as a witness to his leadership practices.

This chronotopic shift is achieved through his prior description of his actions that start on line 23 *itu sudah saya siapin dan itu prosesnya a penyiapan itu tidak secara khusus, tapi sambil sambil jalan proses, dengan lemparan lemparan pekerjaan* “that [mentoring of staff] I have already prepared for this, and that process, um, of preparation is not done formally, but

while, while [we] work, [I] give out tasks”. This talk keeps me and Ismail in the interview timeframe, but the subsequent use of ngoko Javanese deictic *iki* “this” (line 29) helps bring about a chronotopic shift. This use of Javanese is followed by requests *tolong dirampung* “please finalize” and *tolong selesaikan* “please finish” which provide an example of Ismail enacting these practices by transporting Ismail into the past as the one engaging in the practice and asking for things to be finished, and transporting me there as a witnesses to these practices. It is interesting to contrast this instance of represented talk with the next (excerpt 2), which follows immediately after the talk in excerpt 1. In this instance Ismail continues to use represented talk as a way of increasing the believability of his accounts, but this time he uses other features to frame this talk as represented talk.

Excerpt 2 Believe me I do mentor my staff

Researcher

37 = di di di mana = At at at where.

Ismail

38 = >di ruang (tata???)> . In the meeting room.

Researcher

39 ini nanti misalnya . bisa . kalau nda anu . In the future, for example, can [I], if it's
 40 bisa rekam mungkin @sekali kali@ = not um, can I record [these meetings]
 from time to time?

Ismail

41 = oh Oh yes [you can], yes, yes.

42 #bisa# . bisa @bisa@ =

Researcher

43 = atau mungkin Or maybe I can bring a video camera?

44 saya bawa . a:: vidio camera . >bisa>? =

Ismail

45 = Yes [you] can, yes.

46 bisa . iya =

Researcher

47 = jadi . s:- yang bic bicara' . So, s: those who speak can later be

48 saya nanti bisa . #oh ini yang bicara pak [identified], "oh those speaking are Mr. X

49 ini [pak ini# gitu = and Mr. Y, you know.

Ismail

50 [iya = nda masalah . itu Yes, no problems. [Meetings are held

51 sering . saya dua minggu sekali saya often], I do it every two weeks.

52 lakukan itu .

Researcher

53 o:: . I see.

Ismail

54 bisa sifat rapat staf itu saya memberikan The meeting can have the characteristic of

55 pengarahan . giving direction.

Researcher

56 he em = Yes.

Ismail

57 = directing (1.1) >saya punya tugas Giving direction. “I have these tasks,
 58 ini ini . tolong kita selesaikan> . anda please let’s finish them, you this, this and
 59 selesaikan ini . >anda ini ini ini> . atau this” or sometimes two directional
 60 kadang . dua arah .

Researcher

61 he em . Yes.

Ismail

62 #saya# inginnya begini . @anda maunya “I want this. What do you want?” or
 63 apa@ . #atau# >kadang kadang> satu arah sometimes one directional, from them.
 64 . dari mereka .

Researcher

65 he em .

Ismail

66 saya hanya @buka tutup@ . ok keluhan I just open and close [the meeting]. “OK
 67 anda **opo** [@**opo** **what** problems do you have, **what**
 [problems]?”

Researcher

68 [he em . Yes.

Here there are three instances of represented talk (lines 57-59, 62-63, and 66-67), which again achieve a chronotopic shift from reporting about practices in the “here and now” of the interview to performing specific examples of these practices in the “then and there”. At the same time this chronotopic shift brings me into such a meeting to listen to his exchanges with

staff. These representation of talk adds believability (in this case saying something like “believe me I really do hold fortnightly meetings”). How he does this is interesting too, because it contrasts with other ways he interactionally pulls off represented talk. In the case at hand, it is the alternation between how one utterance is delivered in relation to the previous ones that help index a chronotopic shift and a change in “activity type” (Levinson 1992).

More specifically, the delivery of narrative-like orienting information¹ from lines 50-57 does not have the variations in tempo and pitch that start on line 57 after a longish pause. On lines 57-59 Ismail speeds up his tempo (indicated by “>” surrounding the utterance that is spoken faster) then slowing down before speeding up again. Contrasts with prior talk continue to help index chronotopic shift. For example, by slowing down his talk Ismail temporarily brings us back into the interview timespace on lines 59-60 (*atau kadang, dua arah* “or sometimes two directional”) before then using increased volume (indicated by “#” surrounding the word or utterance), normal volume, and decreased volume (indicated by “@” surrounding the word or utterance), to bring us into the timespace of the narrated event on lines 62-63.

Chronotopic shift back to the “here and now” of the interview then follows, this time it is brought about through a contrast of slightly different delivery features, this time a raised volume on *atau* “or” (line 63), followed by a lowering of volume and an increase and decrease in tempo on lines 63-63 (*kadang kadang satu arah dari mereka* “or sometimes one directional, from them”). In this case, contrast in tempo and volume, reference to a they/them in line 64 (*mereka*) rather than the “you” (*anda*) used in line 62, and a second part of poetic repetition of his talk from lines 59-60 (*atau kadang dua arah* vs *atau kadang kadang satu arah dari mereka*) also assist chronotopic shift. Finally, one last chronotopic shift, this time back into the narrated event, is again achieved through a contrast of volume and reference to

¹ This information includes “where” (the meeting room in the building on line 38) and who” (Ismail on line 51, and his staff on line 54).

75 di sekda dari sembilan biro (1.0) itu . Amongst the nine bureaus in the Area
76 tidak ada kabag yang melakukan @itu@ . Secretariate, there are no other
department heads who do this.

In this talk Ismail self-praises on lines 73 by noing that he is the only head among three heads who engages in the type of mentoring he described and performed in excerpt 2. He increases his claims to exemplary leadership by then comparing his earlier represented practices as something not done by any head of department withing nine bureaus on lines 75-76. The instances of self-praise in excerpt 3 are made believable through Ismail's use of represented speech in excerpt 2.

In the following excerpt we see that the represented talk also can be characterized as self-praise. This talk is preceeded by another sequence of self-praise that is followed by two further instances of represented talk. In this case, it is his use of honorific language to staff, his thanking behaviours, the use of material rewards that he uses to motivate his staff to continue to do a good job, and how they think about this. As with excerpts 1-3, the exemplary leadership practices he talks about in excerpt 4 also seems to be positioning Ismail in relation to wider circulating discourses about bureaucrats, in this case negative discouses about leaders who seek personal enrichment from their public service jobs. Unlike the previous excerpts, this talk is not directly related to my question, which checks my understanding about whether one can praise staff while other staff are present.

Excerpt 4 I seek a good name not money

Ismail

1 >makanya> . kalau . pak [author name] ke So if you [come] to my house, I would

2 rumah saya . saya bilang rumah saya say my house is ramschackle. Others at
3 gubug . #setingkat esjlon saya::# (1.0) itu my level, have to have two-stories houses,
4 rumahnya harus tingkat . [standarnya = that is the standard.

Researcher

5 [hm I see, I see.
6 hm:: =

Ismail

7 = di semua kabag itu (laughs) = In all the [other] heads of department.

Researcher

8 = hm:: I see, yes, yes.
9 [heeh heeh =

Ismail

10 [gitu (laughs) . tapi rumah saya biasa It is like that. But my house is very plain.
11 biasa saja =

Researcher

12 = he eh he eh (1.1) Yes, go on.

Ismail

13 #karena# saya bekerja . me::motto motto Because I work using the Javanese motto,
14 jawa . jadi >orang jawa toh ada motto so Javanese you know have a motto like
15 nya> begini . >anda bekerja . pertanyaan this “You are at work, the first question is
16 pertama . ini anda cari **jenang** apa are you after a **name** or a **sweet**?”
17 **jeneng**> .

Researcher

18 hm: (1.0) **jenang** atau? = Yes, a **sweet** or

Ismail

19 = **jeneng** = A **name**

Researcher

20 = **jeneng** . A name,

21 #bedanya apa# . what is the difference?

Ismail

22 jeneng itu kan kalau diindonesiakan kan . **Jeneng** right if in Indonesian is name

23 nama [name . right, name.

Researcher

24 [aha: heeh heeh . I get it, yes, go on.

Ismail

25 **jenang** itu nama makanan . #**dodol**# . **Jenang** is the name of a food [also called] **dodol**.

One minute of talk deleted where Ismail explains that those who seek money are like those who seek something sweet, but will not have a good name. In contrast if you seek a good name, money will follow although not a lot. Ismail notes that his motto is “cari jenang” (seek a good name) and because of that he helps anyone who asks.

Ismail

26 >saya yakin suatu saat dia punya **gawé** I am certain that next time he

27 dia punya program dia punya proyek> . [acquaintances just named] have some sort

28 butuh orang pemda (1.0) >kenapa susah of **event** or a program or project and they
 29 susah **ning kono ono wong sing enteng** need a local government person, [they
 30 **entengan ono wong sing gampangan ono** will think] “Why go through hassles when
 31 **wong sing apikan**> . Ismail (laughs) [we] **have someone who is easy going,**
someone who is easy [to work with],
there is a great person, Ismail.”

In the talk in excerpt 4 Ismail promotes himself as someone who is not interested in personal enrichment, unlike other bureaucrats and heads of department, which is evidenced by his simple house (lines 2-7). He justifies this practice by first citing his belief in a Javanese philosophy that people should be interested in making a good name for themselves, rather than trying to enrich themselves (line 13 onwards). He clarifies this further by saying that once a person has a good name (done by being helpful and accommodating to all), then some additional money will follow. In representing himself as someone who has enacted this philosophy, he sees the benefits of such an approach as making him the first person to be approached when there is a problem to be solved (lines 28-31). The way he does this has both similarities and differences with his talk in excerpts 1-3.

The way he self-praises is similar insofar as he follows an account with represented talk that brings about a chronotopic shift. This shift, which again brings me into another time and place as a witness, is achieved via a change in tempo (line 28) and the use of *ngoko* Javanese to report the thoughts of a number of his acquaintances (lines 29-31). This talk is also similar to his earlier accounts insofar as it also seems to position Ismail in a positive way in relation to widely circulating discourses about corrupt bureaucrats. This chronotopic shift differs to his earlier shifts because it is both about others’ thoughts and because these thoughts are

directly about Ismail's exemplary-ness, rather than an example of him enacting his reported practices.

The use of *ngoko* Javanese also has the potential to add believability to his account. On the one hand, in excerpt 4 its use indexes the type of intimate interpersonal relationship that he has with colleagues who might require his help. This usage also requires some interpretation in light of his earlier represented usage of *ngoko* Javanese forms in interactions with his staff (e.g. excerpt 1, line 29 and excerpt 2, line 67). While this usage is appropriate downwards to staff (e.g. the type of asymmetrical patterns of exchange represented in diagram 1), an interpretation of hierarchical relations doesn't sit well with his account of his intimate relationship with his staff. Recall that in the lead-up to excerpt 1 Ismail referred to his staff as *temen* "friends" rather than *staf* "staff" or *rekan* "colleagues", and later in the talk prior to excerpt 4 he represents his talk with staff as done using honorifics, which is in contrast to pattern c) found in diagram 1. In short, the use of *ngoko* Javanese seems to undermine some aspects of believability.

Even so, if we take into consideration how Ismail continues to build his story about his practices then a clearer picture emerges, which removes some of this ambiguity. Attention to latter parts of the interview shows that Ismail represents his interactions with staff as symmetrical exchanges of *ngoko* Javanese. In excerpt 5, we get a picture of both his talk to staff and their talk to Ismail. This talk occurs after I ask Ismail where he learned his leadership philosophies. In response, Ismail reported that he learned this from doing a lot of reading and from his days as a student activist leader in the late 1980s. This along with his experience working for a foreign company in Jakarta helped him learn the value of professionalism. He summed up by noting that because of these experiences he never stopped studying and learning from his past practices. All of this talk occurred over the course of five minutes before the following piece of talk (excerpt 5), which is also another part of a

sequence of self-praise, this time about his ability to inhabit the studious self that he has just described.

Excerpt 5 Representing dialogue with staff

Ismail

1 tahun kemarin saya ditugasi untuk Last year I was given the task of
2 menyiapkan buku laporan . pertanggung preparing [the governor's] accountability
3 jawaban . >itu setiap tahun> . tapi report, that [is done], every year. But
4 manajemen tahun ini dan tahun depan management from this year to the next is
5 pasti beda . certain to be different.

Me

6 he e:m . Yes.

Ismail

7 #berangkat# . dari me- a: pengalaman Starting from (false start) um, this
8 yang ini . kemudian diinovasi (1.4) a: experience, then we innovate. Um study
9 mempelajari kemarin lemahnya di mana . where [our] past weaknesses were, it's
10 @gitu@ . nah kita grip untuk tahun depan like that. So we get an understanding [of
11 . #wah **iki** loh ya . kemarin **iki bobol** loh# the problems] for the following year "Heh
12 . **this** right, last time **this failed** right?"

Me

13 he em = Yes.

Ismail

14 = **piyé ben ora bobol** . @o ngené “**What** [do we do] **so that** [this] **doesn’t**
15 bos (???) . **fail?**”. “Oh, **it’s like this** Boss.”

Me

16 he: [:m Yes.

Ismail

17 [digrip@ . tapi inisiatip dari @temen [the problem] is understood. But the
18 temen@ . initiative comes from my friends.

Me

19 he em . Yes.

Ismail

20 saya hanya . di rapat staf hanya I just, in the staff meeting I just give an
21 menggariskan . **iki** loh ya . tugas kita . outline, “its like **this** yeah, our task, this
22 targetnya ini . inputnya nanti diharapkan target, the input and output we hope for is
23 ini outputnya kaya begini . like this”.

As with most of his represented talk, Ismail starts with a generalized topic, in this case “learning from experience” before representing talk on lines 11, 14-15, and 21-23. Again the changes in delivery features vis-à-vis immediately prior talk help us differentiate between the “here and now” of the interview and the “there and then” of the represented talk. More specifically chronotopic shift is achieved on line 11 through a combination of increased volume, the use of *wah* (an exclamation token often found at the start of an utterance), and the use of the *ngoko* Javanese deictic *iki* “this”. In addition to helping index a chronotopic

shift, and increasing the believability of his account by bringing me into the story world as a witness, the first use of use of *ngoko* Javanese continues the ambiguity noted earlier.

However, in Ismail's following instance of represented talk on line 14, Ismail represents an unnamed member of staff talking with him in *ngoko* Javanese (lines 14-15). This seems to clear up some of the ambiguity around patterns of Javanese exchange, helping come down on the side of symmetrical exchanges of *ngoko* between intimates. Ismail also invites this type of interpretation by framing this interaction as one amongst *teman teman* "friends" when he notes that initiatives come from his friends (lines 17-18). Note too, that this talk also increases the earlier believability of his accounts as a leader who engages in mentoring and running meetings (excerpt 1), reinforces his claims to using various strategies in meetings (excerpt 2), and positively positions Ismail in relation to ongoing administrative reforms about the need for structured supervision. At the same time, his account here and in excerpt 2 also bring out tensions between old styles of leadership where no directive at all were necessary or at the very least veiled directives (*perintah halus*) were all that was seen as required in interaction with staff.

Conclusion

This paper engages with a history of discussions about interviews and how we go about using interview data. It starts with recent discussions about the utility of looking at interviews as both interactional context and a means to obtaining content (e.g. Briggs 1986; Briggs 2007; De Fina and Perrino 2011; Koven 2014). This paper takes up on Brigg's (2007: 561) observation that interview narratives are ideologically constructed by the researcher as truth-telling events, by investigating how the interviewee constructs his accounts of practice as believable. In doing so, it also takes up three invitations laid out in this work: 1) an invitation to explore how interviews afford interviewees the opportunity to do things that might

otherwise be inappropriate (e.g. Modan and Shuman 2011); 2) an invitation to understand how these contexts enable an interviewee to position their accounts and themselves in relation to wider circulating discourses about people like themselves (e.g. De Fina 2003; Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Koven 2014; Slembrouck 2011); and 3) an invitation to see how these things are interactionally achieved (e.g. Briggs 1986; De Fina and Perrino 2011; Gubrium and Holstein 1997).

Using data gathered as part of linguistic anthropological fieldwork on leadership practices in the Indonesian bureaucracy during 2003-2004, this paper takes up these three invitations and demonstrates the inter-relationships between them. I show how my interviews afford one section head, Ismail, the opportunity to self-praise in a way that in other contexts is quite inappropriate. I link this self-praise with wider circulating negative discourses about bureaucrats by showing how Ismail positions himself as inhabiting a persona that is nothing like those represented in these discourses. Ismail made these accounts believable through regular usage of represented speech which transported me, as a type of witness, from the “here and now” of the interview to the “there and then” of the event he describes.

Obtaining insights into how he went about achieving these chronotopic shifts were facilitated by paying close attention to how he delivered his accounts in the interview. Typically, these chronotopic shifts could be identified by looking at long stretches of interview talk. In this case, Ismail used tempo, volume and alternation from Indonesian to *ngoko* Javanese to move from talking about an event to performing it. His use of *ngoko* Javanese also added a further element of believability to his accounts by way of its indexical relationship with intimate social relations in general; something which he claimed to have with his staff.

While this paper highlights the benefits of attending to interactional context and its relationship with content, my discussion here also highlights some tensions for

Anthropological and other social scientific inquiry, especially around language. Long ago Briggs (1984; 1986) raised communicative competence as an important issue when learning how to ask, and more recently Besnier (2009: 15) commenting on his work on gossip notes: “the careful investigation of gossip as a communicative and social practice necessitates a more than superficial command of language, norms, and presuppositions, as well as an intimate familiarity with the personal biographies of those who are gossiping and are being gossiped about Understanding gossip thus presupposes a degree of intimacy with persons and events that anthropologists rarely attain.” Understanding the content of interviews also seems to invite these types of pre-requisites. While six months sabbatical leave would hardly meet this prerequisite, the years of prior fieldwork we do, often involving learning a number of languages, can still provide us with an initial communicative competence that we can build on to produce insights into the relationships between content and context in interviews. The methodological rub, so to speak, is that to establish how language is used to present accounts as believable requires a considerable amount of prior fieldwork, something in the order of two years (e.g. Agar 1996; Duranti 1997; Kaplan-Weinger and Ullman 2015; Ochs 1988; Saville-Troike 2003; Schieffelin 1990; Spradley 1980; Van der Aa and Blommaert 2015). For graduate students in Australia at least, this seems an increasingly distant possibility because course requirements and funding typically only allow for one year in the field.

Notes

1. [acknowledgments].

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