

recruitment practices of employers or discrimination in discourse. There are two major problems in demonstrating that racial or ethnic discrimination has occurred in a particular instance. The first is the difficulty of locating an appropriate 'control' against which the treatment of a particular party can be compared. The kind of control needed to demonstrate the third condition above, for example, would be so stringent in some cases that it could only be met under experimental conditions. In fact, the only valid estimates of the incidence of discrimination in Britain have been achieved through specially constructed situation tests approximating experiments (Daniel, 1968; Smith, 1977.). The difficulty of inferring the existence of the third condition in naturally occurring social acts has been a major stumbling block in the administration of Britain's anti-discrimination legislation. The difficulties are no less in examining discrimination in discourse. To some extent they are made greater by the relative absence in discourse of analogous events to the institutionalized and regularized practices of job recruitment or the letting and selling of accommodation, each of which may provide opportunities for comparing the treatments given to a number of different parties by the same potential discriminator.

The second problem is of a different kind and relates specifically to the second condition; that is, that the differential treatment be less favorable to one party. In most discussions of racial discrimination, be they academic, legal, or popular, the question of what constitutes favorable or unfavorable treatment is taken to be fairly unproblematic: It is the denial or hindering of access to various legitimate and (presumed to be) universal goals. This assumption of value consensus is occasionally challenged, as when, for example, Muslim parents in Britain began to demand separate single-sex schools for their daughters, which was contrary to the sex-egalitarian tendencies of state education policies. The state's attempt to provide equal educational treatment for all school children of every sex, race, or national origin was regarded by Muslims as less favorable treatment of their minority group, since it impeded the realization of their legitimate religious goals. Similarly, in the analysis of discrimination in discourse, though there are plenty of instances where treatment would be universally recognized as unfavorable (e.g., the use of certain derogatory racial labels), there are also cases where different audiences would fail to agree on whether the treatment of a group was favorable or unfavorable. Their judgment would depend on their view of the world, their ideology, and the evaluative criteria embedded in it. We shall say more about this later and about the problem of control mentioned above. For the moment let us simply note that these two difficulties impose limits on the degree of confidence with which we can bring a verdict of racial or ethnic dis-

crimination in many cases. The tools of linguistic analysis allow us only to identify at most the differential treatment of parties in language, (i.e., the first condition): The rest of the burden of proof (i.e., the establishment of the second and third conditions) must often rely on reasoned argument only.

Before we go on to examine some examples of actual discourse, let us explain what we mean by discrimination in discourse and clear up one possible source of misunderstanding about what the expression refers to. When we speak of discrimination in language, we are not referring to the explicit informational content of utterances—for example, to utterances that have an explicitly hostile, stereotyped, or prejudiced propositional content. What we are referring to is the grammatical form in which the content is expressed and the patterns of lexical choices made by the speaker. Let us use some constructed examples to make the distinction clear:

- (1) *Whites are naturally more intelligent than blacks.*

This statement is simply the expression of a prejudiced attitude. There is nothing in the language used to express this view that is discriminatory between whites and blacks. In contrast,

- (2) *Whites are naturally more intelligent than niggers*

involves differential treatment in the choice of lexical items to denote black and whites. Clearly the utterance satisfies all three conditions of racial discrimination. Consider this example:

- (3) *Black females have the same natural intelligence as white women.*

Here the prejudiced propositional content of the earlier examples is absent, but lexical choice again has resulted in differential treatment of black and white women (assuming the reference is to adults in both cases). We would probably also agree that the use of the term *female* in this case is demeaning, and that this is therefore another case of racial discrimination in discourse. From these examples it can be anticipated that, on occasions, information content may favor a party while the treatment of them in lexical choice or syntax (see below) may be unfavorable (and vice versa). An example of this process with which we are all familiar is when someone is paying lip service to certain attitudes and makes a "Freudian slip," thereby betraying what we then presume (rightly or wrongly) to be their real attitudes.

Discrimination in discourse is not only a matter of lexical choice, though this probably is its most widely recognized form. Here is an example of a 'transformation' that involves differential treatment.

THE QUESTION OF WHAT CONSTITUTES UNFAVORABLE TREATMENT

Unless a society is characterized by complete value consensus, different hearers of an utterance may disagree as to whether a particular treatment is favorable or unfavorable. The white youths in the example above might feel they had been unfavorably treated if they were members of a peer-group culture in which overt and active opposition to coercive forms of adult authority were highly valued. They might feel their status had been diminished by their assignment to a vague and secondary role in the events. Almost all modern societies, apart from the few remaining small, simple societies, are characterized by varying degrees of value conflict; that is, their value systems comprise a number of competing ideologies with roots and affiliations in different social groups defined on the basis of class, religion, national origin, occupation, sex, age, and so on. Ideologies are sets of ideas or theories about the nature of the world and how it works. They provide explanations for why things are as they are by defining the participants and processes in the social world and the relationships between them, as well as the criteria by which the latter may be evaluated and the means by which they may be changed. Ideologies therefore provide explanatory theories and guides to action: They enable us to make sense of the world, to evaluate it, and to act meaningfully in it. In most societies it is possible to identify a dominant ideology. This is usually reflected in the structure and operation of major state institutions and is often held by a large section of the members of the society. In opposition to this ideology, there frequently emerge very clearly defined, consciously held counter-ideologies, often the property of relatively small groups of politically conscious members seeking substantial change of some kind in the organization of the society.

We are aware of the different ideological affiliations of speakers when they use different words to refer to the same thing; for example, *chairman* versus *chairperson*, *freedom fighter* versus *terrorist*, *blacks* versus *niggers*, *riot* versus *demonstration*. We are also aware that the same word has different meanings, connotations, or referents in different ideologies; for example, *black militant* may be a term of praise or condemnation. Ideological variation, then, in any society means that there will be no agreed upon criterion of favorability or unfavorability in the description of a wide variety of social statuses, social actions, or social processes.

Let us give a couple of examples of the problems that this raises. One of the pieces of discourse we analyze in some detail describes the situation of homeless young blacks in British cities. It is produced by a statutory body set up to promote racial integration, and the aim of the article is

- (4) *Black youths stoned the police.
The police were stoned by white youths.*

Both sentences provide the same information (except that the stoners are white in one sentence and black in the other). In the second sentence, however, the verb has become passive. This results in two things: First, it removes youths from the prime location in the sentence and thereby switches the emphasis away from them and onto the police, who now take the prime location, defining the topic of the sentence. Second, it distances the youths slightly from their action (stoning) by the insertion of the particle *by*. The importance of the youths as participants in the second sentence, as well as the closeness of their association with their own physical acts, has thereby been slightly diminished compared with the first sentence. This is a case of differential treatment. We might say it is also a case of less favorable treatment of the black youths if we regard stoning police as undesirable behavior. If as a description of an event in which black and white youths were stoning the police, we read,

- (5) *Black youths stoned the police. White youths were also involved in the trouble,*

we would be aware of a very considerable restructuring of the form in which the information about the white youths is presented when compared with that about the black youths. The first sentence contains a transactive verb,¹ of which the blacks are the agents. Causality is unambiguous—the verb denotes a specific action carried out by the agent that affects a second participant, the police. In the second sentence, in contrast, we have a one-participant structure in which white youths are the subjects of a nontransactive verb that denotes no specific actions on their part; we are not told whether they were actors, experiencers, or patients in the “trouble,” nor what the processes were making up the trouble. In other words, the second sentence above mystifies the role of white youths in the event by the use of the nonspecific words *involved* and *trouble*, and at the same time their presentation as subjects of a one-participant verb has the effect of removing agency from them. The white youths, then, have been very considerably distanced by the speaker from the process of stoning, unlike the black youths, whom we might therefore claim have been discriminated against in the discourse.²

¹ A discussion of transactive–nontransactive models and their implications for the presentation of causality can be found in Kress and Hodge (1979, especially Chapter 3).

² For a systematic method of identifying the distribution of agency in a piece of discourse, see Trew (1979b).