

**Individual Rights Meet the Neoliberal Marketplace of Ideas:**

**Analyzing a Debate on Licensing a Gay Marriage**

**Language and Social Interaction ICA Pre-Conference Abstract**

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My analysis of the interaction is based upon Critical Discourse Analysis, specifically the Discourse-Historical Approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009). This approach views discourse dialectically, as simultaneously reflective of existing power relations and contributing to the construction of these relations. Bridging macro-level theories emphasizing structural forces and more micro-level interrogation of texts, my analysis illustrates how locally situated meanings are negotiated against the backdrop of societal level ideologies and logics. More specifically, I examine the linguistic means through which participants invoke the sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory logics of a liberal citizenship-centered discourse, on the one hand, and a neoliberal logic of the marketplace, on the other. The tools I use include strategies of reference, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, intensification, and mitigation.

In this abstract I will briefly illustrate two elements. The first is the use of *referential strategies*, or ways of representing social actors. In this abstract, I focus on the use of pronouns for the construction of individual and group identities and power relations, and the ways in which different actors *contract* and *expand* the individuals/groups referred to, often in direct reaction to interlocutors, in order to individualize or collectivize their argument. For example, in the beginning of the interaction, David notes that Kim is being disrespectful by smiling at "me" (line 1); Kim replies that she is not being disrespectful to "you" (line 2), and David

immediately transforms this synecdochally into a collective "you" representative of the couple and of the gay community in general (lines 4, 7), as evidenced by the reference to "us" and the idea that "we" don't deserve the same rights as "you" do. The inherent ambiguity of "you" is utilized here to simultaneously refer to Kim (e.g., line 13, "How many times have you been married, Kim?") and to collapse the distinction between individual action and collective ideology, with Kim's rights standing (in a *pars pro toto* argument) for citizens' rights. There are similar examples throughout the interaction (e.g., lines 154-167).

Second, I will demonstrate the use of *argumentation strategies*, in particular the deployment of *topoi* that serve as resources of culturally available key ideas that explicitly or implicitly connect a local argument to a generalized claim or conclusion. Topoi used by the interlocutors here include the topos of justice (all citizens should be treated equally; lines 7-9); the topos of authority (action is legitimate because of the alleged support of a higher authority; lines 18-35); the topos of history (e.g., history teaches us that those who discriminate are remembered unfavorably; lines 75-81, 141-145); and, most significantly in the context of my analysis, the topos of neoliberal service (i.e., people must relinquish their individual ideologies when performing paid service; see lines 44-50, "I pay you to discriminate against me right now"; also lines 116-128 and the discussion on whether Kim is "polite" or not, lines 95-99). I will highlight the ways in which the juxtaposition of these topoi is riddled with fissures, demonstrating the complex ways in which power relations are negotiated in practice.

## References

Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2001). *Discourse and discrimination: Rhetorics of racism and antisemitism*. London: Routledge.

Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2009). The discourse-historical approach in CDA. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (pp. 87-121). London: Sage.