

Talk About Rice: A Discursive Approach to Studying Culture

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Abstract: The paper examines the ways in which people talk about others of different culture or ethnic origin. I analyse interview talk of the British W.W.II veterans about their experiences at the prisoners of war camp in Japan and recent activities of reconciliation. Proposed is a discursive approach to the study of culture and cross-cultural communication, in comparison to work in cultural anthropology and ethnographic conversation analysis. The discussion is guided by two analytic concepts—membership categorisation and ethnification processes. The paper concludes that the ways in which cultural knowledge is constructed, established and shared are discursive accomplishments of a social action of accounting for the war-time past.

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1. Aims of the Paper

This paper examines the ways in which people talk about others, in particular those of different cultures or ethnic origins. It explores the notion of ethnification or how people ethnify others in talk in a cross-cultural context. Taking a discursive approach informed by discursive psychology (EDWARDS & POTTER 1992), ethnomethodology (GARFINKEL 1967), and conversation analysis (HERITAGE 1984), I will look at how cultural otherness is constituted and put to use in talk. Also, I will show ways in which a particular cultural aspect of others is made to be a topic of concern in interaction and establish its relevance to accomplishing social actions. Discourse examples are taken from interviews with British World War II veterans, who were taken as prisoners of war by the Japanese. During the interviews, they gave accounts of the wartime past and shared their views and experiences of reconciliation. The analytical task is twofold: first, to illustrate how rice is rendered as a member's category relevant to the interview talk and how it becomes a discursive resource; second, to examine a process of ethnification, defined as "ethnic identity as a situated accomplishment of interlocutors" (DAY 1998, 1994; MOERMAN 1974). Lastly I will discuss the methodological payoff of the discursive approach as a way of studying culture and cross-cultural issues. [1]

The paper is part of a larger study that examines communicative actions with respect to people's experiences of reconciliation and remembrance of W.W.II. The study explores people's accountability with regard to the past events and actions. It looks at the way in which they produce a version of the past in accordance with their identities and positions, in the process of accomplishing social actions—blaming, justifying, defending, arguing, apologising and the like (BUTTNY 1993). It also shows the ways in which people claim consequences of having participated in activities of reconciliation and discuss what it is to do reconciliation in the participated activities. Social practices of reconciliation concern issues of social remembering (MIDDLETON & EDWARDS 1990), that is, people remember (and forget) together and recount shared experiences of the past by participating in various forms of social activities. [2]

From a systematic observation of a large corpus of data gathered for the study, certain topics and experiences were found to be recurrently talked about by the former POWs in the interviews. Such topics included food and eating practices in camps, especially rice and a rice diet. It seems that events and experiences related to rice are central to the POW life and emblematic of the culture of the camp. Extracts used in this paper concern conversational topics of rice and a rice diet. The ex-POWs' accounts of rice and rice diet are used to mark the Japanese as cultural other and display their past and present understanding of the Japanese people and their cultural practices. My aim is to produce some empirically grounded observations and discuss how the topic of rice and rice diet is brought off as a culturally emblematic category, and used to accomplish specific social actions, that is to claim and account for their difficulty with rice diet in the POW camp. [3]

2. Discursive Approach to the Study of Culture

2.1 Talk of culture as discursive accomplishment

Production of cultural knowledge and its development and dissemination are often a principal academic concern for some anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers and psychologists. Their academic endeavours are invested to explicate forms of cultural knowledge in terms of folk theories, folk psychology and cultural models. The discursive psychologist, Derek EDWARDS states that "approaches to categories and categorization are closely linked to notions of cultural knowledge" (1997, p.250). Cultural knowledge is considered in "the ways in which ordinary people categorize and understand things and events, including human actions and mental experiences" (ibid). EDWARDS argues that much of the analyst's discussions on these forms of cultural knowledge are based on analytical categories that analysts themselves conceptualise the culture which they are set to investigate (ibid). Consequently, "important features of common-sense understanding are systematically obscured, such that we are left with nothing but abstracted cognitive sense-making to explain the data" (ibid, p.251). [4]

Drawing on this discursive psychological approach to studying culture, this paper argues that the ways in which cultural knowledge is constructed, established and shared is a discursive accomplishment. Discursive psychologists and discourse analysts are concerned with explicating how cultural knowledge becomes available to people—the ways in which people come up with and make use of categories and categorization. A discursive approach provides an analytical tool to investigate what it is to be (or not to be) a cultural member of a community. It does not impose the analyst to generate conceptual categories and to apply a standardised measurement technique to analyse the data. This approach provides an empirical basis for studying the constitutive nature of forms of cultural knowledge. [5]

2.2 Marking the cultural other: the anthropological approach

I consider two studies in anthropology to see how culture is studied in various social science disciplines. OHNUKI-TIERNEY's work on rice as self (1993) is the most relevant work on rice. It typifies an anthropological approach to cultural knowledge and the symbolic representation of self through food. She takes a view that "food is a way of marking cultural other" and examines collective representations of self, change, continuity, structure and transformations in relations to other peoples (ibid.). The work is based on the notion of "a presentation and representation of the self using food as metaphor of self" (ibid., p.4) and explores how the Japanese use the metaphor of rice to think about themselves in relation to other peoples (e.g., ethnic groups or nationalities). It aims "to show how the Japanese notion of the self has taken on a different contour as a different historical other has emerged and rice and rice paddies have served as the vehicle for deliberation, although not always conscious, in these process" (ibid., p.5). She acknowledges a methodological challenge in studying collective representation of consciousness as follows:

"In a broader framework it is a question of the development of a powerful representation of the self by the people themselves, on the one hand, and of how to reconcile a dominant representation with apparent multiplicity within a culture, on the other hand." (1993, p.6) [6]

The discursive approach differs from her approach. Instead of looking at multiplicity of voices, selves and variability of people's views and opinions and positions as something to reduce to a model or fit to a conceptual category, the discursive approach views them as discursive resources for the purpose of achieving social actions such as arguing, justifying, agreeing and disagreeing, claiming differences and similarities in representing culture of their own and others. Therefore, tensions between individual and collective representations and between heterogeneity and homogeneity are not treated as a problem and to be resolved in terms of *contested* or *negotiated* meanings and symbolic interpretations in studying culture and self. In this vein, the task here is to show and demonstrate what people do with culture, the ways in which they make cultural difference at issue and attend to the issue of self-representation vis-à-vis cultural others. This paper proposes that the discursive approach provides a basis for showing people's (members') moment-by-moment and here-and-now sense-making of their culture, and others, in relation to the past, present and future. [7]

2.3 Culture as local production of meaning

Particularly relevant to the present paper is the ethnographic and conversation analytic study of Thai culture by MOERMAN (1973). Writing of his approach, he comments that "culturally contexted conversation analysis tries to limit the ingredients of interpretation, the components of meaning" to explicate "members inquiries as locally occasioned, managed and accomplished, within and with reference to the 'here-and-now' circumstances of their production" (1987, p.7). He analyses talk between villagers and an official, and highlights some instances of locally triggered significance of cultural systems in which rice (and other food) as identity marker or a member's category do the business of labelling ethnicity. Also the interactional use of the category "rice" invokes social relations of power and authority of state, which constitute the dominant and dominated in a particular social setting (ibid.). Such conversation analysis permits us to see the active situated use of cultural ideas and local production of meanings accomplished in interaction (ibid.). [8]

2.4 Ethnification process as discursive accomplishment

I now introduce the analytic concept of "ethnification processes", with which the use of identity categories in ethnic (and linguistic) group categorizations have been explored (DAY 1994). Ethnification processes are defined as "processes through which people distinguish an individual or collection of individuals as a member or members respectively of an ethnic group" (DAY 1994). Notably DAY's study takes a discursive approach, and views "ethnic identity as a situated accomplishment of interlocutors" (1994, p.151). The important distinction he

draws is that the discursive perspective does not ask "how someone's ethnic background shapes or determines what they say, but, rather to ask how this ethnicity becomes a resource for them—and others to use" (DAY 1998). Within this view ethnicity identity is a topic in its own right, and its relevance for interlocutors becomes an empirical question (ibid). [9]

In the following I will present the data and demonstrate how the discursive approach to analysing interview materials would tackle cultural issues. The analysis is guided by the analytical concept of membership categorization and ethnification processes. The analysis will illustrate the ways in which participants' claim of difficulty with a rice diet is addressed in the interview setting where participants' and the interviewer's orientation to culture becomes at issue. Let us now look at the examples of such talk. [10]

3. Data

3.1 Background

Towards the end of World War II, sixteen British prisoners of war died due to illness and diseases in a labour camp located in the mountains of central Japan. A grave for the dead POWs was built by fellow British POWs. After the war local Japanese villagers refurbished the grave and erected a memorial. Initially, British soldiers were captured by the Japanese army in Singapore in December 1941 and worked on the construction of the Thai-Burma Railway from 1942 to June 1943. Three hundred British POWs were then transferred to Japan to work in a copper mine until the end of the war in August 1945. Forty-seven years after the war, in October 1992, twenty-eight former POWs and their family members returned to Japan and visited this grave on a reconciliation trip. [11]

In spring 1999 I set out to interview surviving POWs and family members who took part in this reconciliation trip. The key interview question was why they decided to go on the reconciliation trip. This question was designed to elicit their accounts of wartime captivity and post-war experiences of living and coping with difficult times—war-related illnesses and diseases, trauma and presumably any other medical problems. Also, the interview invites them to share their views on reconciliation with the troubling past. The occasion of the interview created a participatory framework of revisiting the past. That is to say, the participants, being engaged in a conversation with a Japanese interviewer, were doing the remembering of the past events and actions. Such remembering is a socially organised communicative action situated in a cross-cultural social setting. [12]

3.2 Participants and setting

Two extracts were selected from a transcript of five-hour recording of a group interview with those veterans who agreed to take part in the research. They were asked to share and discuss their views and post-war experiences of reconciliation with respect to their captivity in the POW camps in Thailand and Japan. The interview was conducted in a participant's home in a north-eastern city in

England. The participants include four former prisoners of war who took part in the reconciliation trip in 1992 and two of their spouses. These two spouses did not accompany their partners on the reconciliation trip. The interviewer is the researcher herself. [13]

4. Analysis

4.1 Talk of rice as discursive resource for accountability of actions

Extract 1 exemplifies a view that rice is a members' category with which the participants display their cultural understanding of rice and a rice diet and establish its relevance in talk. Prior to this interview segment, they trace their experience of being transported from Thailand to the camp in Japan. They speak of a drastic change of diet. What is demonstrated here is that the participants use "rice", as a category which is emblematic of life at the Japanese POW camp. "Rice", as being central to the life at the camp, is brought off as a conversational resource, while the participants account for what it was like to live and work in a Japanese POW camp. The ex-POWs' work of managing accountability entails the presentation of rice diet an unfamiliar cultural practice of the Japanese, as well as a claim for the POWs' difficulty with such a diet.

1. Ted: I've got all sorts of souvenirs
2. Int.: Hummm
3. (.)
4. Ted: >got a< little or- a little box of that we used to you know
5. We got breakfast out o' a little brown bowl (2.) pap rice
6. [(.)a uh and it was rice (.) crushed ((clapping sound))=
7. Charlie: [aye
8. Int.: =um huh
9. Ted: in water (.) and they called it like porridge [you know
10. Int.: [Yeah
11. Ted: Just a little brown bowl like that. That's what we got.
12. That was at five o'clock in the morning
13. [was it six o'clock about
14. Charlie: [ye that was six o'clock
15. Ted: a six o'clock then you went
16. [() then you got a (.) your little box (.)
17. Int.: [hummm
18. Ted: your *bento*, was it?
19. Int.: hum, lunch [box

20. Ted: [and they used [to put rice in there
 21. [(clapping noise))
 22. Int.: [uh huh≠
 23. (.)
 24. Ted: and maybe if you're lucky a little bit of uh Soya sauce or
 25. something in it
 26. Sidney: aye if you were lucky
 27. Mary: ∞(hhhhh)∞
 28. Int. if [you're lu(h)cky(h)
 29. Ray: [(the first time) the first [time (when)
 30. ?: [lucky
 31. Int.: [() just plain rice
 32. Ray: The first time we got those boxes they had been varnished
 33. or something [hadn't they
 34. Charlie: [() they were quite
 35. Sidney: [no they hadn't
 36. Ray: You couldn't eat the rice
 37. (.)
 38. Charlie: [O≠hh
 39. Int.: [()

Table 1: Souvenir from the camp (Extract 1)¹ (Italicised words are of Japanese origin.) [14]

The analysis of the extract focuses on the ways in which cultural otherness is constituted through telling about items that the POWs used to use in the camp and later brought back to Britain as memorabilia, as produced as "souvenirs" (line 1). The word "souvenirs" suggests that the things they brought back are worth remembering. Stories produced about these items give rise to both personal and shared meanings of the past in the present interactional circumstances. A tangible object such as a lunch box, which represents a particular past at issue, becomes an aid for recalling past events that are relevant to a particular conversational setting and organisation of social relations. In other words, the objects work as discursive resources for entering into a particular moment in the past and establish its relevance in interaction. In this extract, "rice" is treated as a common reference point, and the talk about rice establishes a mutual understanding of what it was like to live with a rice diet and other related cultural practices that were markedly different from and unfamiliar to their own. [15]

1 The transcription convention used in this paper has been developed by Gail JEFFERSON for the purposes of conversation analysis (see ATKINSON & HERITAGE 1984). The exact transcription notation employed in the extracts is listed in the appendix.

In this extract, "rice" deserves a term which denotes something more than a reference point, perhaps a membership category? The membership category refers to classifications or social types that may be used to describe persons in its original definition (SACKS, 1992), but it is later extended to collectivities and non-personal objects (HESTER & EGLIN 1997). Descriptions of objects and events provide for the accountability of actions; they are used to generate excuses and deal generally with "attributional" issues of cause, intention, and responsibility (EDWARDS & POTTER 1992). A fine-grain analysis of the organisation of turn-taking and uptakes unveils the ways in which various descriptions as to how rice was cooked and served in the camp are produced *in situ* interactionally. These descriptions ascribed to the category "rice" constitute a claim for the participant's difficulty with a rice diet, and they are subsequently formulated as a problem. [16]

4.2 The cultural practice of a rice diet in the POW camp

In the opening sequence, a reference to souvenirs is specified in Ted's utterance, "a little box" to put in "a little brown ball (2.) pap rice" and eat with (ll. 4 & 5), and his detailed and animated description of what the box is and how it was used for eating rice (ll. 4-6 & 9). The term, souvenir, as referred to things which the POWs brought back from the POW camp, seems to be ironic considering the context in which the interview is about their experiences of captivity and reconciliation. "Souvenirs" are generally a reminder of some positive experiences in the past, but in this case the experiences may not necessarily be pleasant. But does the interviewer treat this as irony? Here, the interviewer's receipt and the brief pause (l. 3) seem to solicit and encourage the speaker Ted to produce further description and accounts. The descriptions make reference to a mealtime and a crockery to serve rice with, including details as to how rice was prepared and how it was served and eaten in the camp. For instance, the exact mealtime is debated among the participants, Ted and Charlie, marking some significance of the time of breakfast (ll. 12-15). This exchange makes a point (and even a complaint) of how little and infrequent the POWs ate at the camp. Issues dealing with food shortage and scarcity are talked about later (see the discussion on Extract 2). [17]

4.3 Ethnification and shared understanding of the past

Let us look at how the author's identity as Japanese is marked and made relevant in talk. In line 18, Ted actively seeks the interviewer's response by checking his memory of a Japanese term for lunch box that is at issue (ll. 16 & 18). First, after the debate over the breakfast time, Ted refers back to the topic "little box" in line (l. 16, "then you got (.) your little box (.)") and a brief pause at the end for his pursuit of the interviewer's response. Then, in line 18 he specifically asks the interviewer to reply to his question ("your *bento*, was it?"). The way this is responded by the interviewer indicates that makes Ted's question with the Japanese word "*bento*" directly relevant for the interviewer, and therefore interactionally nominates the interviewer to take the next turn. The Japanese word, *bento*, the English equivalent of lunch box, ethnifies the interviewer as Japanese, someone who is assumed as culturally informed and linguistically competent on the topic in progress. Joint construction of what *bento* means

interactionally accomplished: the interviewer displays her knowledge by offering a gloss in English (l. 19, "hum, lunch [box]"), which is completed by Ted with his embodied action (l. 21). This joint construction of what *bento* means not only ethnifies the interviewer, but also constitutes a mutual understanding of the particular past at issue (ll. 16-23). [18]

4.4 Claiming difficulty with a rice diet

The talk in this extract illustrates how Ray's problem with a rice diet is worked up in the rhetorical work that is accomplished with the category "rice". The difficulty of eating rice is discursively formulated by the description of the box, a rice container used to serve and transport rice at the Japanese camp. In addition to the descriptions given by the participants in reference to how the box was used, the speaker's embodied action, for example, clapping sound of simulating a packing of rice in the box (ll. 6 & 21) demonstrates a cultural practice of what to do with rice in the Japanese camp. [19]

Now I would like to focus on the latter part of the conversation (ll. 24 onwards) and discuss how the talk of the box mediates further telling of difficulty with a rice diet and affords the speaker Ray's claim of difficulty with rice (l. 36, "You couldn't eat the rice"). How is this claim formulated as sensible and legitimate without making an explicit blame? The difficulty with a rice diet is attributed to two features of rice and its cultural practice. First, tastelessness of rice is invoked in Ted's description in line 24 ("and maybe if you're lucky a little bit of uh Soya source or something in it"). This formulation seems to be ironic, for "maybe if you're lucky" orients to the opposite of being lucky, and it is offered as a mitigated claim of the extremity of hard conditions of the camp. This claim is endorsed and warranted in the way in which Ted's utterance is duly picked up, that is, the affiliational uptakes of the other speakers such as Sidney's recitation of the utterance (l. 26), followed by Mary's laughter (l. 27), and the interviewer's recitation and interpolated laughter (l. 28). The interviewer's summation in line 31, "just plain rice" displays her understanding of the nature of the problem and aligns herself with the other speakers. [20]

The second feature is the unusual appearance of the box. This is registered in Ray's description of the box in line 32 ("The first time we got those boxes they had been varnished or something hadn't they"). The emphatic reference to the rice holder as being "varnished", as well as rice being served in a little box, exoticises the cultural practice of how rice was eaten. All these allusions to how food was prepared in the Japanese camp have bearings on the speakers' normative expectations of how to prepare food in their own culture. Ray's claim of difficulty with the rice diet as something legitimate and warrantable is achieved by how he describes the preparation of the rice. [21]

In the ensuing section, I will examine further the ways in which this claim of difficulty with rice is handled interactionally and discuss the interactional consequences of it. To this end, I will use an analytical concept of membership categorization device (SACKS, 1992). I will argue that culture is treated as a topic

of talk and a members' concern, rather than it being presumed an *a priori* concept. I will then consider usefulness of such a concept in analysing discourse. [22]

4.5 Rice as a membership category

In the next extract, the participants are discussing their experiences of, and displaying their knowledge of rice. Various descriptions regarding the category "rice" have emerged and are attributed to a particular ethnicity or culture of other. In SACKS' terminology, describing can be considered a "category-bound activity" (1972). SACKS notes many activities are common-sensically associated with certain membership categories (1972). Considering that the interview pertains to the war-time events such as captivity in a POW camp, what has been brought off as part of a members' category can be highly consequential to the future trajectory of interaction and become a source of potential conflict among the interlocutors. We now look at how those categories and descriptions are introduced and worked up, and identify what are interactional upshots as part of managing a delicate nature of the interaction.

40. Ray: Cos anyway, all our cooks didn't know how to cook rice did
41. they?
42. Charlie: Well er:: they're quite-
43. Ted: no::: [(unless)]
44. Charlie: [they're] quite- canny
45. Ray: Some of the rice was er:
46. (.)
47. Charlie: Not as good as the Japanese rice (.) the rice (.) Japanese
48. is flaky (a bit) innit, [you know
49. Int.: [um ummm
50. Charlie: But we got inferior rice as the prisoners of war
51. Int.: oh ye[ah?
52. Ted: [oh:::h
53. Charlie We didn't get the best rice.
54. Int: hu[mmm
55. Ray: [well the first rice you got it had been treated with lime
56. hadn't [it? Really for sowing
57. Charlie: [it ha:d aye
58. Ted: We had lime rice (.) I think it
59. [was used for plantin' the rice.
60. Int.: [what's that?

61. Int.: Oh
62. Ted: a lime rice and what was that the other one? (.)
63. ∞Lime and something else∞
64. Ray: The lime (was to:) with the preserve it er::
65. [as: a: seed rice you see?
66. Ted [(it was another kind) and it was a [horrible
67. Int. [It's a brown rice?
68. Ray: Pardon?
69. Int.: Brown rice? It's like uh (.)
70. Ray: Oh yeah [()
71. Charlie: [with the rusk on you mean
72. Int.: [Not- not refined rice
73. Charlie: [ah we used to get that sometimes
74. Ted: We used to fight for rice polishers (.) didn't we
75. Charlie: [aye
76. Sidney: [rice polisher(h)
77. Ted: You know when you polish the rice- the-

Table 2: Rice in the camp (Extract 2) [23]

This extract is rich with a collection of descriptions (or subcategories) regarding the category rice—the Japanese rice, flaky rice, the inferior rice, the best rice, rice for sowing, lime rice, planting rice, seed rice, brown rice, and not refined rice. How do these categories work in relation to Ray's earlier claim of the difficulty with a rice diet in the camp? How is his claim handled in the interaction? Let us focus on the ways in which the speakers, Ray, Charlie and Ted bring off categories of rice in interaction and see what they accomplish interactionally. The problem of a rice diet is formulated as a legitimate problem for the POWs. Here the ex-POW speakers do not make an explicit criticism of the Japanese rice diet, nor do they implicate the interviewer into the problem of this cultural practice. [24]

In the opening sequence, Ray goes on to elaborate on his problem with a rice diet. By formulating in this way, Ray implies that a rice diet is not just his problem, but that it is also problematic for the other prisoners, including experts such as cooks (ll. 40-1, "all our cooks didn't know to cook rice did they?"). Here, as the speaker is normalising the problem, he offers more descriptions of rice (l. 45, "some of the rice was er:"). This is followed by a brief silence (l. 46), perhaps indicating his pursuit for comments from others. Charlie takes over from Ray, providing a description of rice that elaborates on Ray's point. Here two categories of rice become available (ll. 47-48): one is the rice which was eaten by the POWs ("not as good as Japanese rice (.) the rice (.) Japanese is flaky (a bit) innit"), and

the other Japanese rice that is, by implication, of better quality and is presumably eaten by the Japanese. This contrasting set of categories, made by the speakers' descriptions, suggests that the problem of a rice diet is linked to their being British POWs. The problem of rice diet, originally attributed to the food with no substance and taste (from Extract 1) is now being reformulated as implicitly having to do with differential treatment (possibly discriminatory) at the POW camp. [25]

Let us examine line 49 onward to see how the participants and the interviewer work on this problematic statement. In doing so we can examine how multiple categories of rice, delivered interactionally, contribute to accounting for the troubling past. In Charles' statement (l. 49, "but we got inferior rice as the prisoners of war"), we can consider the use of collective voicing of "we" and as spelling out the identity position of "prisoners of war". This is an implied criticism on the Japanese. Charlie implicitly blames on the Japanese at the camp, perhaps for their differential treatment of the POWs. In addition, he suggests that it may have been done deliberately on the part of those Japanese who treated the POWs. The adjective "inferior" which appeals to the morality (or lack of the Japanese) in such treatment, and thus makes the criticism legitimate. [26]

The interviewer responds to this problematic attribution as a dispreferred answer, seeking further explanation (l. 51, "oh yeah?"). Ted's emphatic response in line 52 overlapped with the interviewer also seems to attend to Charlie's problematic statement. Charlie's reformulation (l. 53, "we didn't get the best rice") is elaborated by Ray who offers more category-related terms "treated with lime" and "rice for sowing" (ll. 55-6). Additional categories mitigate Charlie's charge (and suspicion) that the POWs were served with the inferior rice on purpose. Following from Charlie's agreement (l. 57), Ted endorses this category (l. 58) and offers another category "[rice] used for plantin' the rice". The descriptions of both speakers, Ted and Ray, in lines 62-65 seem to be making sure that they stay on the topic of "the lime [rice] with preservatives" and "seed rice". These categories in the upshot hearably work as a repair of Charlie's earlier problematic formulation, by emphasising technical properties of rice, rather than judgmental or moral attribution. [27]

Not only the ex-POW participants but also the interviewer participate in talk about rice. How does the interviewer handle this potentially problematic talk? When Ted speaks of lime rice in line 55-6, the interviewer actively seeks an explanation (l. 57, "what's that?") and acknowledges Ted's explication (l. 59) as a news receipt (l. 61, "Oh"). The category that the interviewer offered, "brown rice" (l. 67) matches up with a collection of categories for rice—rice for planting and sowing, or "seed rice". The interviewer claims her understanding of rice served in the camp by producing the category "brown rice" as part of the collection of category rice. "Brown rice" is accepted by Ray in line 70 and Charlie with his reformulation as "[rice] with rusk on you mean" (l. 71). The interviewer has another go at producing "not- not refined rice" for reassurance, and this is ratified by Charlie (l. 73). As shown here, the interviewer produces a few categories and displays her cultural knowledge that is relevant to the topic of rice. She is not a passive hearer

of the talk about rice, but takes part in the ongoing talk, signalling her participation. The turn-taking and production of categories of rice illustrate the ex-POWs' work of accountability to address the difficulty of the rice diet in the camp—what it was like to live in extreme circumstances, in which food and eating become a crucial, daily concern. The interviewer's role is noteworthy here; her participation in the talk about rice collaboratively accounts for the problem of the rice diet. The ex-POW participants manage to talk about the problem vis-à-vis the Japanese interviewer without becoming hostile and making an overt criticism of the cultural practice of eating rice. [28]

5. Concluding Remarks

The extracts analysed in this paper concern the conversational topic of rice and rice diet at the Japanese POW camp during WWII. Rice was treated as a key conversational topic in the interview with the ex-POW, while discussing their views and experiences of reconciliation. As demonstrated in the analysis of the extracts, a close examination of talk of rice and a rice diet allows us to see what people do with a seemingly mundane topic such as rice, in a cross-cultural interactional setting. By focusing on the analytical concepts of ethnification and membership category, the analysis illustrated the ways in which a culturally emblematic category of rice is made use of by the participants and certain descriptions and predicates of rice and a rice diet are worked up interactionally in order to do the business of accountability—claiming the participants' difficulty with rice diet in the Japanese camp. It is important to note that rice itself is not bound to an intrinsically fixed symbolic meaning as shown in the participants' talk about their experiences of rice and a rice diet. Cultural anthropologists would treat rice in terms of a symbolic representation of self and society at large, but here rice is treated as a member's concern and a discursive resource in performing social action with which interlocutors orient to what it is to live in a culture of others. Cultural otherness is constructed through such talk. [29]

Rice and its related activities are central to the life of the POWs, and therefore are emblematic of the culture of the camp. The talk offers a reference point, or context, in which the participants discursively manage a sensitive domain of issues without having to be hostile to one another. This point is evidenced in the ways in which ex-POW participants and the interviewer display their understanding and affiliation to an argumentative position as *in situ* discursive accomplishment. The analysis takes place at a micro-level, focusing on turn-taking and how sequential organisation unravels ethnification process of which the participant ethnifies the interviewer and seeks her alignment to do a work on potentially problematic statement and claim. In turn the interviewer's accommodation to the ethnification is registered as part of the interactional upshot, collaborating to the interviewees' accountability work. [30]

So, does the discursive approach miss out any linkage to the grand theory of culture? How do we make sense of our own analytical enterprises without having to address larger theoretical issues of society—power, social structure, gender and ethnicity, etc. in studying cultural practices? Are we simply complacent with

technical production of vignettes of empirical observation and indifferent to the macro-level concern with theorising and conceptualising culture? The analysis advocating a discursive approach makes seemingly ordinary features of social life and people's everyday activities such as talk visible to others. The analysis outlines the participant's way of understanding and making sense of culture in context where talk is naturally occurring. Explication of what people do in talk illustrates people's way of sense-making activities and how such activities are performed. [31]

Studies of culture and cross-cultural communication have traditionally concentrated on classifying and interpreting features of data taken from a particular culture. The researcher then puts forward a universal model, concept or set of explanations of the culture through his or her theorising cultural phenomena and application of standardised measurement techniques. In contrast, the discursive approach commits to explicating locally produced and situated meaning in the making—illustrating the ways in which members handle cultural issues and establish their significance interactionally. The discursive approach employed in this analysis provides a viable tool as it permits us to see the very moment-by-moment process in talk where people's cultural understanding and knowledge are displayed, shared and established as relevant. Membership categories such as rice are discursive resources to achieve social actions of accountability of the past in social practices of reconciliation and other socially organised sense-making activities. [32]

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Appendix

[Overlap begins
≠	Vertical arrows precede marked pitch movement, over and above normal rhythm of speech.
Underlining	Signals vocal emphasis
∞I know it,∞	"degree" signs enclose obviously quieter speech
()	Inaudible, indecipherable utterance, uncertain hearing
(0.4)	Pause (in seconds and/or tenths of a second)
(.)	A micropause, hearable but too short to measure.
((text))	Additional comments from the transcriber, e.g., gesture, context or intonation, comments by the transcriber
she wa::nted	Prolonged syllable or sound stretch
hhh	audible aspiration or laughter
.hhh	audible inhalation
bu-u-	hyphens mark a cut-off of the preceding sound
>he said<	"greater than" and "lesser than" signs enclose speeded-up talk.
<he said>	the other way round of the signs enclose slower talk.
solid.= =We said	latched utterance (no interval between them)
Sto(h)p i(h)t.	Laughter within speech is signalled by h's in parentheses, audible aspiration within a word

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