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## No Buts! - Researching Children's Consumption, an Exploration of Conversation and Discourse Analytic Techniques

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# 'No Buts!' – Researching Children's Consumption, an Exploration of Conversation and Discourse Analytic Techniques

**Key words:** Children, Consumption Culture, Qualitative Methods, Conversation Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Focus Groups

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## **Abstract**

Contemporary discussion of social research with children revolves around three trends (i) an emphasis on researching children's 'experiences' rather than their 'perspectives', (ii) an emphasis on researching 'with' children rather than 'on' children or 'for' children and (iii) a conceptualisation of children as 'social beings' not 'social becomings'. This paper poses questions about *how* qualitative data is analysed and posits a two-pronged CA/DA (conversation analysis/ discourse analysis) approach as a potential means to enhance richness in qualitative research in the area of children's consumption phenomena. Drawing on a number of illustrations from an ongoing research project this paper seeks to illustrate how a CA/DA approach to children's talk-in-interaction around consumer culture and brands can be useful in addressing the ways children use these resources to construct social worlds and identities.



## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper aims to illustrate a CA/DA (conversation analysis/discourse analysis) approach to conducting research with children and focuses on the analysis of children's talk around consumer culture. While the majority of the literature surrounding children's consumer culture has come from communications studies (Seiter, 1993), cultural and media studies (Kline, 1998, Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1997) and to a large extent managerial and marketing studies (Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003, Macklin and Carlson, 1999, McNeal, 1992), this paper comes from a sociological perspective and focuses on a discussion of methodology. It is motivated by an interest in the empirical investigation of children's engagement with consumer culture. The first section provides a brief overview of contemporary discussion around social research with children highlighting that while there is increased attention being awarded to discussion of researching children's experiences, most of this literature focuses on methodological techniques and little distinction is made between data generation techniques and data analysis. The second section addresses researching talk-in-interaction with an emphasis on the techniques of CA and DA. The third section posits that these analytic techniques may be usefully applied to children's talk around consumer culture. CA asks the researcher to engage with the interaction at a micro level of analysis while DA allows the researcher to address the broader narratives within which the discourse is constructed and emphasises analysis of the performative nature of talk-in-interaction. The final section draws on data from an ongoing research study to illustrate some of the features identifiable in children's talk around consumer culture.

## **I SOCIAL RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN**

Contemporary discussion of social research with children revolves around three trends (i) an emphasis on researching children's 'experiences' rather than their 'perspectives', (ii) an emphasis on researching 'with' children rather than 'on' children or 'for' children and (iii) a conceptualisation of children as 'social beings' not 'social becomings' (See Christensen and James, 2000, Greene and Hogan, 2005, Greig and Taylor, 1999, Corsaro, 2005, Qvortrup, 2005). Current thinking has been influenced by the paradigm shift instigated by Alison James and Alan Prout almost two decades ago which saw a focus on social constructionism emerge within the sociology of childhood. James and Prout (1990) criticised the dominant model of the child within sociology as being a direct import from psychological theory which essentially drew on developmental theory. Mayall (1996) argued that Piaget's work had dominated developmental and socialisation theory to the extent that it had become very difficult to think of children without using his scheme. "The net effect of the Piagetian



frameworks has been to devalue what children know and hence their competence.” (1996, p.45) Qvortrup (1994) went as far as to argue that prior to the first international research project which was conducted under the auspices of the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research and which addressed childhood as a social phenomenon, sociology had no tradition for studying childhood.

According to Corsaro (1997) the field of sociology remains dominated by socialisation theory which is essentially individualistic and forward looking. Indeed the same could be argued within the field of consumer research (See Roedder, 1999 for an overview of this literature). Gunter and Furnham (1998) look to socialisation theory, social learning and cognitive development theories in addressing the various stages children pass through on the road to ‘becoming’ fully-fledged consumers. They describe children as resembling ‘all other consumers’ as ‘sophisticated shoppers’ and holders of ‘pragmatic attitudes’. Corsaro has coined the term ‘interpretive reproduction’ as an alternative way of addressing children. Interpretive reproduction views children’s evolving membership in their cultures as reproductive not linear. Children don’t simply imitate or internalise the world around them, they strive to interpret, make sense of their culture and to participate in it. Language and cultural routines are central to this alternative perspective (see also James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Corsaro is optimistic about the resurgence of interest in children in sociology and he comments that while this renewed interest in children grew primarily from ‘fine-grained ethnographic studies’, research on children has now become more diverse and more reflective of sociology’s general aim which he describes as studying social phenomena at multiple levels of analysis (2005, 45-46).

This paper adopts a view of children as socially competent beings, Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998) describe the twin dynamics that make up the new social studies of childhood (1) a dynamic of children’s social competence: children are viewed as active agents who possess and can assert complex social competencies in their own right and (2) a dynamic of social enablement and constraint: children’s competences are situated within concrete social contexts in which there may be differently structured and variably enforced efforts to constrain, as well as enable, the competences that children are allowed or encouraged to manifest. This perspective suggests a picture of childhood which is not linear but rather involves struggles for power, contested meanings and negotiated relationships. Thus ‘childhood’ is defined not as a natural phenomenon or stage of life but a historically and culturally variable social construction.



Greene and Hogan (2005) in their edited collection on researching children's experience contend that despite increasing usage of qualitative methods in research on children and childhood, there is a dearth of discussion on methodological issues in relation to children. Greene and Hill (2005) contend that there is a long tradition of research on children's experiences going back to Mead's work in the 1930's but it has not been largely influential. They emphasise the importance of qualitative methods for researching children's experiences but comment that many of these methods have been developed within the traditional positivist model of the child and how the child should be researched.

*"Contemporary perspectives on children's lives that characterise children as social actors and that place emphasis on seeing children as embedded in a rich socio-cultural context demand methods that can address these conceptualisations. In many ways, our repertoire of methods is inadequate to the task. They speak to the isolated child in a fixed and universalised context. (2005, p.15)"*

While increasing attention is now being given to methods and data generation techniques which can provide access to children's experiences and social worlds this paper seeks to address the question of analysis. Qualitative approaches generate large quantities of data which are recorded in various ways and interpreted by researchers. Usually the findings are presented in a neatly packaged and organised fashion but a discussion of analysis and interpretation is left as implicit. Greene and Hill comment that it is essential for researchers to scrutinise and take account of their own position as an enquirer and describe an extra layer of interpretation as being deserving of extra analysis (2005, p.8).

While much of the research on children within consumer society has been qualitative in nature and proclaims to provide children with a voice albeit on a topic dictated by the researcher, this paper poses questions about *how* qualitative data is analysed and posits a two-pronged CA/DA (conversation analysis/ discourse analysis) approach as a potential means to enhance richness in qualitative research in the area of children's consumption phenomena. The focus is on analysing children's talk-in-interaction.

## **II RESEARCHING TALK-IN-INTERACTION**

Woofitt (2005) explains that everyday speech such as that generated in interviews or focus groups does not resemble fictional depictions of talk. 'It is not grammatically neat and tidy, but appears on the surface to be disorganised and messy' (2005,p.10). CA (Hutchby and



Woofit, 1998, Sacks, 1992, Speier, 1971) aims to provide an elaborate account of the way in which talk-in-interaction, is constructed and understood by the speakers (Kitzinger & Frith, 1999: 299). CA is employed to look at a number of areas, interactional order, the moment by moment exchanges taking place within conversation, story-telling, collaboration and conflict, thus providing a degree of ethnomethodological groundwork in terms of how children's culture is constituted. CA tells a story in which (i) turns and hence (ii) individual speakers are the heroes (and villains) of the drama of the talk. CA is concerned with the intricacies of talk and therefore employs an elaborate transcription system which is designed to preserve these tiny details of speech including the singular utterances, the pauses, the sighs, the inhalations and exhalations, the overlap and the whisper; and it is through this activity that a detailed interpretation is constructed. This is in contrast with most methods of qualitative analysis which clean up the data in order to make it more readable.

The Potter and Wetherell (1987) brand of DA has been employed to look at language in a broader social context. As people engage in conversation they set up various accounts and versions of events, these accounts and versions often alter during the course of the social interaction. The study referred to below draws on a number of analytic concepts including subject positioning and interpretative repertoires. Potter and Wetherell (1987) define an interpretative repertoire as a culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognisable themes, common places and tropes. Repertoires position people socially hence to speak a repertoire is to speak from a subject position or to build a social identity. Aldred and Burman (2005) cite Henriques et al (1998) and Davies and Harre (1990) in saying that language can be seen as providing 'subject positions' for speakers to occupy rather than 'perspectives'. "As we speak, we are positioned and position ourselves in particular ways which serve certain functions" (2005, p.179). The emphasis here is on how the language functions to construct social identities and positions.

While CA and DA employ similar methods of data generation to broader qualitative analysis techniques; the ways in which the captured data is subsequently transcribed and analysed varies depending on the methodological framework employed. A key difference between DA and a more general thematic qualitative analysis is that variability, ambiguity and contradiction rather than consensus, both between and within accounts is predicted and explored. These differences between analysis techniques and foci are not merely superficial; they are symptomatic of deeper views on interpretive research. Gilbert and Mulkay (1984:5)



who were amongst the founders of DA argue that a basic four step procedure informs much qualitative research

1. Obtain statements by interview or by observation in a natural setting.
2. Look for broad similarities between the statements.
3. If there are similarities which occur frequently, take these statements at face value, that is, as accurate accounts of what is really going on.
4. Construct a generalised version of participants' accounts of what is going on, and present this as one's own analytic conclusions.

This type of procedure allows many analysts to overcome problems posed by variability but according to Gilbert and Mulkay it also rests on a 'naïve' view of language in which it is assumed that any social event has one 'true' meaning. For the majority of qualitative researchers language is conceived of as a medium through which we pass thoughts (ideas, intentions, information) between each other. However, CA and DA focus on utterances as performing actions and displaying action orientations respectively (Woofitt, 2005).

Given that so much of sociological analysis is based around verbal and textual accounts deemed as 'good enough' representations of external realities, Woofitt (2005:23) questions the research endeavours emerging from the field claiming there is a large-scale misunderstanding of the nature of the data analysed. Acknowledging the *performative* nature of talk as opposed to the *representational* nature of talk poses problems for researchers who wish to work with sanitised, coherent 'sociological stories', but conversation and discourse analysts don't accept that language can be treated as a neutral representation of either objective social realities or internal attitudes and opinions and instead view language as to use Goffman's words (1981) the 'custard' or 'jam' of social interaction.

### **III CHILDREN'S CONSUMPTION CULTURE – A CA/DA APPROACH**

This paper aims to show the value of CA and DA as methodological approaches in the study of children's consumption phenomena. While data generation techniques such as interviews

or focus groups are adapted to suit children's physical, social and cognitive needs, the analytical techniques of CA and DA can be applied to children's talk in the same way that they might be applied to adult talk. DA work seeks neither to identify features intrinsic to children, at the expense of either differences between them or of their commonalities with



adults, nor does it identify the accounts any particular child participants give as necessarily defining or entirely representing their individual 'perspectives'. (Aldred and Burman, 2005, p.179)

Cook-Gumperz and Kyratzis in their comprehensive overview of child discourse studies describe discourse analysis as focusing on the ways children give narrative sequencing to events, provide coherence to the actions in a story, attribute motives and provide emotional evaluations 'the child's identity is not a social given not merely an expression of the social world into which he or she was born, rather it is realised through the interactive use of language' (2001, p.594). Aldred and Burman posit that discursive approaches to research "challenge the conventional distinction between data collection and analysis, question the status of research accounts and encourage us to query taken-for-granted assumptions about the distinctions between adults and children" (2005, p.175).

The field of CA emerged first and foremost from the work of Harvey Sacks. He argued that children have 'restricted rights to talk', which consist of a right to begin, to make a first statement and not much more. Thereafter they proceed only if requested to (Sacks, 1986, p. 344). He observes a number of solutions which children have evolved to deal with this dilemma including manipulation of the question-answer chaining rule and children's use of stories (see Sacks, 1986 for an exposition of these features of children's talk). Corsaro (1997, 2005) argues that "although studies of childhood consumer culture tell us a great deal about children's preferences and their roles in the consumer decisions, they only rarely and very narrowly explore children's actual use, refinement and transformation of symbolic and material goods within peer cultures" (2005, p.131). Australian sociologist Beryl Langer is exceptional in this regard. Langer (1999, 2002) has written on childhood, consumer capitalism and the culture of consumption. In a large-scale qualitative study Langer and Farrar (2003) used focus group interviews to explore what being Australian meant to school children. She addressed Australian children's participation in global culture and found that 'the taken-for-granted currency of social exchange' revolved around branded consumer culture. The global culture of consumption was one of the most obvious sources of material available to Australian children for use in the 'symbolic project' of the self – including their understanding of what it means to be Australian.

This paper draws on data from an ongoing study. The overall aim of this study is to explore the ways in which children negotiate and manipulate the material and non-material



resources<sup>1</sup> of consumption culture as they engage in the construction of their own social worlds through talk. The focus of this paper is data analysis. The next section of the paper will attempt to illuminate how a CA/DA approach to children's talk-in-interaction around consumer culture and brands can reveal something about the ways children use these resources to construct social worlds and identities. For illustrative purposes the author will draw on analysis of two focus groups which were conducted during one phase of this ongoing empirical research study.

### **Analysing Children's Talk Around Consumer Culture**

A demarcation has long existed between commercialised and non-commercialised resources within children's culture; toys were among the first objects to be commodified and produced in mass. However, what has changed significantly is the volume and range of commodities now offered to children, the speed at which the fashion cycles and technical sophistication of these child-centred commodities change and the value of the sign i.e. the brand that is attached to the commodity. The social consequences of not keeping on top of the changing trends can be detrimental for children as marketers promote inclusion through common allegiance to certain brands and products. While it is impossible for any child to possess every next 'must have' commodity, value-laden information surrounding these commodities has become a cultural resource in itself <sup>2</sup>(Ritson and Elliott, 1999).

The extracts below are taken from transcriptions of activity-based focus groups (Eder and Fingerson, 2003) which were conducted with two groups of children (a single-gender group of three year old boys and a mixed gender group of four year olds). The focus groups were conducted in a Montessori school following a one day observation visit on the part of the researcher. Two activities were employed (i) a 'bingo' game which used brand logos some of which were specific to children's cultures and some of which were non-specific; (ii) a 'Christmas Tree Decoration' game which involved the children choosing laminated cards taken from a toy catalogue with which to decorate a felt Christmas tree (the use of velcro as a sticking medium was particularly useful for play-based activities with young children). The focus groups were recorded using a digital handycam. Employment of a digital video

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<sup>1</sup> Non-material resources refers to the possession of value-laden information that surrounds cultural commodities as opposed to the possession of the good or experience itself.

<sup>2</sup> There has been a growing emphasis on the active or productive nature of consumption and the polysemic nature of commercialised commodities and advertising messages (Williamson, 1978, Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1986). The performative nature of adolescent talk around commercial culture has been explored and conclusions drawn concerning the 'social uses' of the commercialised messages proffered to consumers in a study by Mark Ritson and Richard Elliott conducted in the UK in 1999.



recorder greatly facilitated the transcribing procedure as the researcher could see as well as hear the participants. Without video it can prove quite difficult to distinguish between the children's voices.

The aim of conducting the focus groups was to generate talk around children's consumer culture. This paper argues for a conceptualisation of the child as a competent social agent who accomplishes specific social ends through talk. These social ends may be about power, gender or broader social identity construction. Consumer culture and all that it signifies for children is viewed as a social resource from which they can draw on as they engage with one another through talk. The research is motivated by questions around what children do with brand/commercial knowledge and preferences. How do they use the material and non-material resources to construct themselves and others in social interaction?

The first step in any qualitative research project is the transformation of the raw data (interview recordings, field notes, historical data, etc) into a manageable corpus of 'analysable' material. This material is usually in a written format and might consist of transcripts of interview and focus group conversations, observation notes, extracts from documentary evidence to name but a few sources. The raw data arising from the study under discussion here consists of video footage recorded on digital video cassettes. These were then converted to MPEG video files and transcribed with the aid of the software package Transana<sup>3</sup>. While DA conventions don't require the same level of detail in transcription as CA, for the purposes of a two-pronged approach such as the one employed in this study the Jeffersonian transcription system is employed (Jefferson, 1984). This system provides symbols for turn-taking transcription conventions, speech delivery transcription conventions and extra-conversation conventions (See appendix A for transcript notation).

Employment of the Jeffersonian transcription system to transcribe children's focus groups might be described as 'not for the faint hearted'! It is an arduous task to undertake particularly when transcribing group conversation, as tiny timeframes of talk-in-interaction must often be repeatedly played in an effort to detect overlapping talk or fast-paced

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<sup>3</sup> Transana is designed to facilitate the transcription and qualitative analysis of video and audio data. It provides a way to view video, create a transcript, and link places in the transcript to frames in the video. This software is designed by Chris Fassnacht and David Woods at the Wisconsin centre for educational research and is available free from [www.transana.org](http://www.transana.org)



sequences of talk for example. In practice transcription of focus groups is an iterative process. After an initial transcription phase, interesting passages of talk can be identified and isolated for closer transcription. So analysis of the data begins with transcription as (i) the researcher cannot detach themselves from their research aims as they engage with the raw data in transforming it into an 'analysable' format and (ii) features of the data which are salient to the research aims will be identified by the researcher as they engage in the act of transcribing.

The CA/DA framework adopted in this ongoing study is not about 'giving' children a voice or seeking out their perspectives on consumer culture. Rather it seeks to analyse the ways in which children negotiate and utilise talk generated around the material and non-material resources of consumer culture. Through talk-in-interaction children construct social worlds and identities. Employment of conversation analytic tools and terminology invites the researcher to analyse the micro-level talk-in-interaction. This reveals children's strategies for gaining and holding the floor, story-telling and conventions in question/answer sequences. These conversational features are examined and interpreted in terms of what they reveal about the ways children negotiate consumption-related cultural resources including but not exclusively knowledge around branded commercial commodities as a resource to talk with. Using a CA framework and set of terminology is a helpful way of exploring the generated talk and the subsequent repertoires and positions that emerge. The commonality, variation and ambiguity in talk can then be addressed in an attempt to provide a textured interpretive account of children's talk around consumer culture – its features and perhaps more importantly how it functions in building children's social worlds.

Talk-in-interaction around structured activities using branded stimuli (mostly child-centred) produced a discourse based around consumer culture. Employment of discourse analytic resources (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) specifically identification of interpretative repertoires and subject positions revealed that in making sense of their social worlds as consumers of commodity culture, children's talk is coloured by the employment of broader cultural ideas or narratives. Repertoires are versions or ways of speaking about in this case a broader discourse around consumer culture. A number of interpretative repertoires were identified and labelled as (i) 'Individualism' (ii) 'Universalism' (iii) 'Fear-Based' and (iv) 'Ownership'. Repertoires position people socially hence as the children spoke through a chosen repertoire they positioned themselves socially through the construction of a number of different subject positions throughout the conversation. The repertoire of individualism constructs a subject



position of self-directedness and independence from societal or peer-related influences. The repertoire of universalism constructs subject positions of shared understandings. The fear-based repertoire coloured talk around specific 'character-based toys' and constructs subject positions of fearfulness and fearlessness. Finally the ownership repertoire is drawn on to build a subject position of authority and power. Other positions which are identified using both conversation analytic and discourse analytic tools include winners & losers (in terms of strategic games and dominance of floor), individuals and allies, (demonstrations of difference and sameness), babies and non-babies, (age appropriate interests) fans and experts, scared people and brave people, 'I's' and 'us's'. The performative nature of talk is especially evident when occurrences of commonality along with variation and ambiguity both within and between accounts is analysed. It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss with any degree of substance initial findings of this ongoing research project (see Freeman, 2005 for further discussion on repertoires and subject positions) but the final section of this paper will illustrate a small number of the conversational strategies, repertoires and subject positions children draw on as they negotiate talk around consumer culture and how that talk functions in building children's social worlds.

#### **IV CHILDREN'S TALK-IN-INTERACTION AROUND CONSUMER CULTURE**

The extracts below are taken from two focus groups conducted as a part of an ongoing research project. One group is labelled FG#1; this was a single gender group of three year old boys. The second group is labelled FG#2 and was a mixed gender group of four year olds. The material is presented in an attempt to illustrate (i) identification of interpretative repertoires (ii) identification of subject positions arising from these repertoires (iii) conversational features employed by the children as they talk around consumer culture related topics.

These features are not addressed in isolation but are grouped under three thematic headings for the purposes of the illustration only.

##### **'Individualism and Empowerment'**

Social competence is displayed by children in talk-in-interaction through their abilities to gain and hold the floor in conversation. Extract one is a forty second passage of talk generated as the children engage in a game of 'brand bingo'. The stimulus material presented is the Coca-Cola logo (one of the cards used in a game of picture bingo) and the talk that ensues demonstrates that three year olds immediately recognise this global brand,



some children consume it and some children don't. However, a closer analysis suggests that while the conversation appears to revolve around preferences, there is more going on throughout this interaction. Tim and Jake are initially explicit in their favourability towards the product while Alan draws on the repertoire of individualism in stating that he doesn't consume coke (line 194). He positions himself as quite separate from the brand in stating his preference for water and providing an Irish translation for water that is 'uisce' (pronounced ishca). His disassociation with coke is empowering for him as it allows him to maintain the floor through a successive number of turns (lines 194 to 206). In a successful attempt to win the floor Robert and Jake generalise Alan's individualism into a 'finding Irish words' game. By observing Robert's repetition of Alan's 'water is uisce' utterance (line 210) we see Robert take the floor and begin a game. He positions himself as a cultural expert through his own Irish translation for milk, which is bainne (pronounced bonya) (lines 210 and 212). Local knowledge is thus employed in maintaining talk-in-interaction over wider brand knowledge. Tim repeats his preference for coke in a number of successive turns but he is not successful in gaining the floor. This is illustrative of an instance of non-commercial empowerment despite the availability of the commercial resource (i.e. Coca-Cola as topic of talk) first by an individual Alan and then by an emergent group. What is significant about this extract from a data analysis point of view is that the interpretation discussed above could only have come about (i) with a close transcription which captured talk that appeared at first irrelevant and 'messy to transcribe' as the children moved away from the focus of the branded stimulus material and (ii) a concern on the part of the researcher in analysing conversational strategies specifically in this case floor-gaining and maintaining strategies.

### **Extract One (FG#1)**

06:02.8

186 OF:                    Yeah right are we ready for the next one?(.8) Everybody Ready!  
(2.0)

187 Jake:                ME ((holds his hand in the air))

188 OF:                    .hhhh you got it Jake (1.7) what is it called does

189                        anyone know?

190 Tim:                  Coke

191 Jake:                  Coke

192 OF:                    °Coke Do you like coke?

193 Jake:                  Yeah

→ 194 Alan:                I don't drink coke



195 OF: Do you not Alan why is that?  
196 Tim: Well I do (.)  
197 Alan: Cos I only (1.0)  
198 Tim: [cos I DO]  
199 Alan = I don't like that  
200 OF: [Do you not do you what do you like?  
201 Jake: [I like coke  
202 Alan: Water  
203 OF: Water very good  
204 Tim: I like I LIKE COKE TOO  
205 OF: Do you Tim?  
206 Alan: And water is uisce  
208 OF: Water is uisce (.)my goodness you know Irish aswell  
209 Jake: (unclear)  
→ 210 Robert: Water is uisce  
211 OF: Water is uisce (.) OK Ready  
→ 212 Robert: and milk is bain::ne  
213 Jake: Bain::ne  
06:46.6

**Note: OF is the moderator**

### **'Universalism and Ownership'**

The commercially based universal discourse surrounding the topic of Spiderman<sup>4</sup> sees talk-in-interaction sustained for fifty five seconds in extract two below. Rosie is wearing a 'Spiderman' top and the moderator comments on this attempting to engage with her. Rosie is monosyllabic in her responses to the moderator's questions but she is successful in commanding the attention of the other children who remain focussed on her throughout this passage of interaction. She is clearly demonstrating material ownership of a consumer culture artefact but she appears unable to articulate it. Michael is articulate in demonstrating his knowledge of this phenomenon. He employs a non-commercial family-based discourse in

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<sup>4</sup> Spider-Man is a fictional character, a Marvel Comics superhero created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. He first appeared in a comic book in 1962 and has since become one of the most recognizable of all superheroes. Through the years, he has appeared in many media, including several animated series, a daily and Sunday comic strip, and two very successful films, with a third one debuting in 2007.



sustaining the conversation and describing his viewing habits, sometimes he watches with his brother and sometimes he watches on his own. Michael does not question Rosie's authority as an expert on Spiderman but instead questions the universal nature of the Spiderman phenomenon (lines 111). Following Rosie's assurance to the moderator that there 'are' spiders in the Spiderman cartoon, Michael expresses that there are no spiders in 'his one' (127). This variation in Michael and Rosie's respective accounts reveals that for Michael a universal phenomenon can be consumed in an individual way. There appears to be room for multiple realities in Michael's social world and this is an interpretation which results from close transcription and a focus on the moment-by-moment exchanges which take place between the children and the moderator during this one minute of talk-in-interaction.

### **Extract Two (FG#2)**

3.29.5

99 Michael: >Spiderman!<

100 Lisa: (turns to Rosie to speak) (... Rosie)

101 Rosie: (nods) yes

102 Michael: she (.)em Lisa has it! (*Points to Lisas bingo card*)

103 OF: That's right! Lisa you put a counter down (.) yeah put

104 one down (2.0) well done and Rosie you've got Spiderman

105 on your top do you like Spiderman a lot?

106 Rosie: (*nods her head fast*)

107 Michael: I LIKE IT once I watched it wi with my brother Juliet

108 OF: Oh right and what em (.) is it a cartoon?(to Rosie)

109 Rosie: ((nods))

110 OF: °yeah

→ 111 Michael: [no]

112 OF: And do you like watching it every day Rosie?

113 Michael: [ah but I .hh I em sometimes

114 I watch it on my own

115 OF: Right and sometimes you watch it with your brother

116 Michael: Yeah

117 OF: And is it scary at all cos I don't really watch it

118 Michael: [No

119 OF: Is there spiders in it?

120 Rosie: (*Nods, the other children are all focussed on Rosie*)



121 OF: Are there?

122 Rosie: (*Nods again*) (1.5)

123 OF: (*Nods with Rosie*) And are the spiders a bit scary?

124 Rosie: No

125 OF: No not at all

126 Lisa: (*says something inaudible to Rosie and points at her card*)

→ 127 Michael: BUT but there's no spider in my one

128 OF: Is there not? oh right ok >are we ready for the next one?

4.25.6

### **Fear, Age and Gender**

Talk around Spiderman and Scooby Doo <sup>5</sup>was coloured by a fear-based repertoire. Extracts three and four below illustrate the gendered nature of this fear-based repertoire as employed by Alan. In extract three Alan positions himself along side his brother who *is not* afraid of Spiderman (line 236) and in opposition to his sister *who is* afraid of Spiderman (line 221). Extract four sees Alan again position himself as 'fearless' in the context of Scooby Doo. He attempts to gain the floor during a period of overlapping talk stating that he likes

Scooby Doo. He wins the floor and breaks grammatical conventions with the second part of his utterance when he states 'But I'm not afraid of the monsters'(line 344). His style of articulation provokes some amusement in the moderator but also wins her support in positioning him as brave within the group (lines 346 & 348). While Alan is not displaying linguistic competence, he is demonstrating himself to be socially competent at positioning himself as fearless. Whether he is scared or not of the 'monsters in Scooby Doo' is not important from a discourse analytic perspective, what is interesting is that a fear-based repertoire surrounding Scooby Doo can be employed to construct oneself as fearless through talk-in-interaction. Scooby Doo or Spiderman provide social resources with which both fearful and fearless positions can be constructed.

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<sup>5</sup> **Scooby-Doo** is a popular and long-running American animated television series produced by Hanna-Barbera productions now Cartoon Network Studios. Repeats of the original series, as well as second-run episodes of the current series, are broadcast frequently on Cartoon Network in the U.S. and other countries.



A straight-forward thematic style analysis would certainly pick up on associations between the consumption phenomena of Scooby Doo and Spiderman and fear; and a moderator who was focussed on getting to underlying 'truths' may have probed further during the focus group interview in an effort to uncover further description from the children on this association. This would be helpful in terms of critiquing the commercial phenomena themselves, however, a discursive focus tells us something about how these particular characters and their stories/associations can be used as a social resource during talk-in-interaction to construct one self within the group.

### **Extract Three (FG#1)**

06:46.6

215 OF: Look are you ready read:eeeeee?

216 Jake: I HAVE IT (2.7)

217 OF: What is it called?

218 Jake: SPIDERM:AN

219 Tim: Spiderman

220 OF: Well done

→ 221 Alan: Well I'm not scared of Spiderman

222 ? : [spi - der - man]

223OF: Are you not?

224 Alan: No

225 OF: [>Do you like him?<

→ 226 Alan: well my si my my sisters scared of him

227 OF: Is she? what's your sisters name?

228 Alan: (1.0)Maria

229 OF: Maria and what age is she?

230 Tim: SHE'S FO:UR

231 OF: °four

232 Alan: No Yeah

233 OF: And she's a bit scared of spiderman is she?

234 Alan: [yeah

235 OF: OK

→ 236 Alan: °But my brother isn't



237 OF: [Are we are we nearly have we have we  
238 nearly got a winner ?  
07.16.6

**Extract Four (FG#1)**

11.57.5

341 All: ( branded stimulus material is placed on table)(02.5)

342 Tim: >Scooby Doo< ((unclear overlapping talk))

343 Alan: I like (.) [I like Scooby Doo (2.0) I like Scooby Doo]

→ 344 But I'm not scared of the monsters (in Scooby Doo)

345 Jake: [Bar]

346 OF: Are you not!?(laugh)

347 Jake: Barney ((leans across table to point at Barney card))

348 OF: You're not scared at all

Finally extract five below illustrates an age-related repertoire evident within talk-in-interaction around consumer culture. 'Barney'<sup>6</sup> provides a conversational resource which can be utilised to position oneself as 'grown up' that is in opposition to being positioned as 'a baby'. It seems that Barney is consumed as an age-appropriate toy and is associated with very young children or babies. However, Michael carries out some careful interactional work in his positioning. Close transcription reveals that this is a delicate matter for Michael. The long pauses (line 336) followed by his soft intonation (line 337) suggest some sensitivity around the subject of Barney and his age-appropriate status. The employment of speech delivery transcription conventions in this extract is revealing. Michael is careful to position himself as Anti-Barney but he is discreet in his positioning. He could have delivered his 'Its just for Babies' utterance in a loud or boisterous manner but it's interesting that in this pre-school setting i.e. the target market for the 'Barney and Friends' phenomenon, he is discreet and sensitive in his tone.

**Extract Five (FG#2)**

13:04.6

334 Michael: I like princess Max

335 OF: Princess Max? I don't think I have him (.) do you

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<sup>6</sup> *Barney & Friends* is a children's television show produced in the United States and aired across the globe. The show is mainly aimed at preschoolers, starring a large purple tyrannosaurid-like dinosaur named Barney. The show is supported by a large range of merchandise.



336                    like Barney: ?((offer a Barney card)) (2.5) No    why not: ? (2.0)

→ 337 Michael: °It's just for babies

13:17.4

## **V CONCLUSION**

This paper has sought to emphasize the value a CA/DA approach can bring to the area of children's consumption culture. The extracts discussed above are not intended as anything more than illustrative of the many types of conversational and discursive features evident in children's talk around consumer culture. It is hoped that they serve to illustrate what can be gained by transcribing children's talk using CA conventions. Speech delivery transcription conventions such as pauses and intonation markers can provide a rich insight into the manner and fluency with which the words were articulated. This in turn can provide a more textured interpretation of what the children are achieving or doing as they talk. DA reveals broader narratives that children draw on as they negotiate and make sense of talk around consumer culture. Sometimes brands can prove empowering to 'talk with', on other occasions individualised or local knowledge can lead to more sustained talk. Finally identity based subject positions are constructed through talk around consumer culture. These positions include winners and losers in terms of empowerment through controlling the floor,

individuals and allies which can be constructed through agreement or disagreement over consumption-related preferences or babies and 'non-babies' as constructed through positive or negative affiliation with Barney.

Crucially empirical research on talk-in-interaction illustrates that as Seiter (1993) argues consumer culture provides children with a shared repository of images, characters, plots and themes; the basis for small-talk and play, but hopefully it goes a step further too in highlighting that children engage with consumer culture in an active manner and make sense of it and construct themselves within it in innovative ways.



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## Appendix A

Symbol	Name	Use
Turn – Taking Transcription Conventions		
[text]	Brackets	Indicates the start and end points of overlapping speech
[[	Double Brackets	Indicates the speakers start a turn simultaneously
=	Latching	Indicates the break and subsequent continuation of a single interrupted utterance
-	Hyphen	Indicates an abrupt halt or interruption in utterance
Speech Delivery Transcription Conventions		
(# of seconds)	Timed Pause	A number in parentheses indicates the time, in seconds, of a pause in speech
(.)	Micro pause	A brief pause, usually less than 0.2 seconds
. or	Period or Down Arrow	Indicates falling pitch
a:		Indicates less marked falls in pitch
a <sub>~</sub>		Indicates less marked rises in pitch
,	Comma	Indicates a temporary rise or fall in intonation
>text<	Greater than/ Less than	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more rapidly than usual for the speaker
<text>	Less than/ Greater than	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more slowly than usual for the speaker
°	Degree symbol	Indicates whisper or reduced volume speech
!	Exclamation	Indicates an animated or emphatic tone
ALL CAPS	Capitalised text	Indicates shouted or increased volume speech
<u>underline</u>	Underlined text	Indicates the speaker is emphasising or stressing the speech
:::	Colon(s)	Indicates prolongation of an utterance
(hhh)		Audible exhalation
? or (.hhh)	High Dot	Audible inhalation
( text )	Empty ( )	Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript
Extra-Conversation Conventions		
(guess)		Indicates transcriber's best guess
(( <i>italic text</i> ))	Double Parentheses	Annotation of non-verbal activity
	Left margin arrows	Specific parts of an extract discussed in the text

Jeffersonian Transcription Notation is described in G. Jefferson, "Transcription Notation," in J. Atkinson and J. Heritage (eds), *Structures of Social Interaction*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.