The War on Terror and Muslim Britons’ Safety: A Week in the Life of a Dialogical Network

Ivan Leudar
The University of Manchester, U.K. (Ivan.leudar@manchester.ac.uk)

Jiří Nekvapil
Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic (jiri.nekvapil@ff.cuni.cz)

Introduction

There is a growing body of academic work analysing presentations of the attacks on the USA on 9/11/2001 and their consequences. This includes recent special issues of Discourse and Society (2004, vol. 15, No. 2&3) and Journal of Language and Politics (2005, vol. 4, No. 1), Lincoln (2003), Chilton (2004, chapters 9, 10) and Hodges and Nilep (2007). One shortcoming in much of this excellent work is that it adopts a western perspective: as a matter of routine the corpus used gives voice to some participants in the hostilities rather than others. This is apparent even in explicitly politically aligned and critical work such as Richardson’s (2004) book on misrepresenting Islam. No analysis can, of course be ‘transcendental’ - each has grounding, perspective and a purpose. Yet, if the aim is not just to subject a particular text to a formal analysis, using it as ‘evidence’, but to make visible the links between texts so as to grasp the conflict, analysts need to aim at a practically accomplishable completeness of the corpus. We had this problem in mind when analysing presentations of Roma in Czech media (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2000, Nekvapil and Leudar, 2003). We made some effort to include in our materials not just the pieces about Roma but also the admittedly rare public events in which Roma participated. Using such a corpus we demonstrated that representations of Roma are contested, with the Czechs’ rejections of Roma not simply reflecting fixed stereotypes but contingent on specific social activities. In our recent paper (Leudar, Marsland and Nekvapil, 2004), we analysed the affinities in presentations of the attacks in George Bush’s addresses to the nation, statements to the British House of Commons by Tony Blair (and the ensuing debate) and statements by Osama bin Laden’s broadcast on Al-Jazeera Television. Bush, Blair, and Bin Laden used ‘us/them’ minimal category pairs with the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ drawn in different but contrasted and hence connected terms, distinguishing ‘us’ from ‘them’ in secular and religious terms, respectively. The two pairs of categories, glossable respectively as ‘defenders of civilisation’/‘terrorists’ and ‘defenders of Islam’/‘infidel crusaders’ were not independent. They were coordinated through their common incumency - any participant in the ‘war on terror’ has a double and contrastive identity, each version grounded in competing perspectives on that conflict. Bin Laden is an incumbent of the category ‘us’ as he formulates it - he is ‘a defender of Islam’. He is, however, also one of ‘them’ as that category is formulated by Bush/Blair - he is ‘a terrorist’. The same goes for his enemy: President Bush is one of ‘us’ – a defender of freedom and democracy but also one of ‘them’ – a crusader attacking Islam.

The representations of the parties to the conflict were, however, not simply coordinated referentially, through the obviously common incumency of competing categories. The two ‘us/them’ membership category pairs were joined in their mutual opposition, grounded in the enemies’ formulations of the conflict - the war between civilisation and barbarism on the one hand, and the religious war against...
the infidels, the enemies of Islam, on the other. The contrary formulations of the conflict were not just words, they were consequential: they provided moral justifications for violence and served to recruit allies.

Our analysis revealed that the enemies’ statements were dialogically networked, as was revealed by the coordination of their membership category work. One interesting commonality between Bush and Blair’s arguments in the days following 9/11 was their systematic and public effort to take religion out of the conflict. Yet there was a subtle difference between them which we did not focus on at the time. Blair narrated the events so as to minimise the backlash against the Muslim community, especially in the United Kingdom whilst Bush did not evidence such concern. In fact, according to Lincoln, his statements employed Old Testament derived references and indicated to his radical Christian allies that the conflict was a war between religions (Lincoln, 2003). In this paper we further develop our analysis of how, through membership categorisation, Blair and the representatives of the Muslim community in the UK managed in public-view the relationship between Islam and the terrorism. We extend the corpus used in Leudar, Marsland and Nekvapil (2004) to include additional Muslim parties, thus obtaining a more complete view of the happenings.

Before we proceed to do this, however, we first spell out the way we do the analysis. We analyse ‘discourse’ but we do not aim to isolate invariants, that is de-situated discursive structures or strategies or devices, nor do we read texts through the forms discovered by other analysts even though this may be occasionally helpful. Some ways of studying practices of membership categorising (i.e. how categories of people and their activities are composed and used) border on formal semantics (e.g. Jalbert and David, this issue). Unremarkably in ethnomethodology, our analysis is, however, of participants’ practical reasoning in and about happenings, with the aim of making such reasoning, its grounds and consequentiality, clear. The aim of Leudar, Marsland and Nekvapil (2004), and of this paper, is to make visible the links between the reasoning of those involved in violent conflicts – the allies, the enemies and those caught in between - working towards an account of how such links are accomplished without necessarily engaging in face to face interactions. Our analytic ‘routine’ has four logical characteristics. First, since argumentation in the political domain tends to be partisan, it is at least membership ‘category indicative’ (i.e. category incumbency can be allocated on the grounds of how a person argues), possibly ‘category transformative’ (a category can be transformed on noting how its incumbents typically argue) and even ‘category constitutive’ (arguing in a particular manner may not be incidental to a category but essential). We therefore always pay attention to how membership categories are managed and are concerned with both category maintenance and change. Second, the reasoning in and about conflict is not a disinterested meditation but lays the ground for future violence and moralizes past violence. As Sacks (1992) commented, membership categorizations are consequential; they provide moral grounds on which to speak and act (cf. Edwards, 1997). Third, practical reasoning is occasioned – even an argument that is a recognizable repeat still has to be performed somewhere and so is never quite like what others argued elsewhere or how they did so. The fourth and crucial aspect of our method involves putting ‘an utterance’ in an appropriate setting. Levinson, following Goffman, noted some time ago that participants may be situated in interactions as overhearers, this providing them with limited rights to contribute (Levinson, 1988). Media audiences are sometimes thought of as overhearers, but Greatbatch (1992), analysing turn-taking in studio debates,
noted that participants in the studio do not position viewers/listeners as ‘eavesdroppers’ on their private exchanges but rather as ‘primary addressees’. We observed in addition, that politicians participating in TV debates may address their remarks to specific parties not in the studio, and occasionally get a response (Leudar, 1995). These physically absent parties are obviously more than ‘overhearers’, and more than members of a grouped audience. The setting of political talk is typically broader than the immediate sequential context (which is of course essential).

Our analysis then crucially involves setting an activity into a progressively broader flow of happenings thus gradually revealing its meaning (cf. Anscombe, 1959; Sharrock and Leudar, 2003). This analysis in turn draws on the work of John Austin who commented that the identity of an action is to be sought not in psychological depths (i.e. by inferring or even just attributing cognitions to individuals) but instead by providing a progressively ‘thicker’ description of activities (Austin, 1970, chapters 7 and 9; cf. Leudar and Costall, 2004). The analytic problem is to bring together happenings that are mutually relevant for those who participate in them (this is what used to be in Pragmatics ‘the context selection problem’). To accomplish this we have formulated the conception of ‘dialogical network’ (see, e.g., Leudar and Nekvapil, 1998; Nekvapil and Leudar, 1998; Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004). We are concerned with two contingent issues. First, we demonstrate that dialogical networks are distributed in face-to-face interactions and media discourse and have some unique properties. Second, we are concerned with the local work that is required to initiate a network, or orient and contribute to an existing one. The relevance of an ‘exophoric’ setting is locally indicated by addressivity markers in talk or a text. These may include explicitly addressing absent parties and referring to other dialogical events, as well as oblique textual

and argument affinities. The relevance can, however, also be a matter of the subsequent uptake, where two initially apparently unconnected spatially and temporarily separate dialogical happenings are grouped together in talk of a third party - maybe a politician or a journalist - and so made mutually relevant for others. The local conversation with all it entails is absolutely necessary for the emergence of a dialogical network, but not just in one place and at one time, but in several, maybe many places and the network is distributed over these.

Analysis

We shall analyze and inter-relate the following texts.

1. the record of a Downing Street press conference on 11th of September 2001;
2. a press release by the Muslim Council of Britain on 11th of September 2001;
3. a record of a Downing Street press conference on 12th September 2001;
4. The Guardian report on 12th September 2001;
5. a press release by the Muslim Council of Britain on 13th of September 2001;
6. a Hansard record of Anthony Blair addressing the House of Commons on 14th September 2001;
7. The contributions on 14th September 2001 of Khalid Mahmood and Mohammad Sarwar to the debate in the House of Commons following (6);
8. a press release by the Muslim Council of Britain on 18th of September 2001; and
9. An editorial in the Muslim News on 28th of September 2001

On 11th of September 2001, the British Prime Minister issued the following statement.
1. The full horror of what has happened in the United States earlier today is now becoming clearer. It is hard even to contemplate the utter carnage and terror which has engulfed so many innocent people. We've offered President Bush and the American people our solidarity, our profound sympathy, and our prayers. (20 lines omitted)

11. As for those that carried out these attacks, there are no adequate words of condemnation. Their barbarism will stand as their shame for all eternity. As I said earlier, this mass terrorism is the new evil in our world. The people who perpetrate it have no regard whatever for the sanctity or value of human life, and we the democracies of the world, must come together to defeat it and eradicate it. This is not a battle between the United States of America and terrorism, but between the free and democratic world and terrorism. We, therefore, here in Britain stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends in this hour of tragedy, and we, like them, will not rest until this evil is driven from our world.

Blair contrasts two versions of the conflict: USA vs. terrorism and ‘free and democratic world’ vs. terrorism, opting for the second view. As we have shown elsewhere (Leudar, Marsland and Nekvapil, 2004), this formulation is designed to make religion irrelevant to the conflict, since the ‘free democratic world’ includes secular societies and those with diverse religions (including Islam which has as much regard for the sanctity or value of human life as Christianity does). The notable aspect of (1) is, however, that Blair is offering ‘prayers’ and using words with religious connotations (‘evil’ and ‘sanctity’). The use of these words by itself of course does not necessarily make one accountably religious, or specifically a Christian. Their use is however indexical – here against the background knowledge that Blair is a practicing Christian. Using the words with this contingency makes his Christianity notable and relevant in situ. The use of these words is unlikely to be accidental – the statement is not an improvised, spontaneous or an emotional piece – it is prepared, and most likely not just by Blair himself. Moreover, he is not talking about the ‘free and democratic world’; rather in speaking from Downing Street he represents that world. His religious status is not just a matter for his individual consciousness but a possible category-bound characteristic of the defenders of the ‘free and democratic world’.

It is arguable that if those defenders are Christians, then the terrorists are likely to be Muslims. Why? Using one member of ‘minimal category pair’ in the right setting invokes the other member (cf. Sacks, 1992) and ‘Christian’/‘Muslim’ pair is salient. That pair has been explicitly invoked by bin Laden and denied by Blair and Bush (see Leudar, Marsland, Nekvapil 2004). Blair is, however, not a Christian all of the time - his social identity is normally carefully managed and contingent on settings. So why is he a Christian now? One possibility is that like Bush’s, Blair’s speeches indicate to some that his understanding of the attacks is religious. Chilton (2004) remarked that “in some western states politicians have to take account of religious sensibilities, both in the negative direction of not offending any religious group and in the positive direction of favoring (maybe despite appearances) some particular group” (ibid, p. 175). The expression ‘sanctity’ or ‘value of human life’ indeed joins two different understandings – religious and secular - and could have been designed for a dual audience. To understand the design of

64 http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page1596.asp

65 Levinson’s (1988) analysis of White House tapes and Lynch and Bogen’s (1996) of Contra affair make visible cooperative nature of political speech construction.

66 On designing political speeches for multiple addressees see Kühn (1995).
the statement, however, we have to relate it to how it was taken up elsewhere.

It is more likely that Blair is squaring two, at first sight contrary, requirements. One is the need to take the religion out of what will become the ‘war on terror’; this in order to secure allies in the Muslim world.

The second is to allow these allies to support the ‘war on terror’ in their own (religious) registers. The rhetorical power of having Muslims, speaking as Muslims, rejecting the violence carried out in the name of Islam is obvious. Speaking as a Christian may carry the danger of indicating that the conflict is between Christians and Muslims but it also sets the precedent for the Muslim allies to condemn the attacks as Muslims. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) fills the niche.

(2) Muslim Council of Britain 11/09/01
1. 11th September 2001
2. MCB expresses total
3. condemnation of terrorist attacks
4. British Muslims, along with
5. everyone else, are watching events
6. in America with shock and horror.
7. Whoever is responsible for these
8. dreadful, wanton attacks, we
9. condemn them utterly. These are
10. senseless and evil acts that appal
11. all people of conscience. The
12. MCB stands shoulder to shoulder
13. with remarks made by our Prime
14. Minister Tony Blair. Our thoughts
15. and prayers are with all the
16. innocent victims, their families
17. and communities. We convey our
18. deepest sympathies to President
20. No cause can justify this carnage.
21. We hope those responsible will
22. swiftly be brought to justice for
23. their unconscionable deeds. As the
24. British Muslims come to the full
25. realisation of these most awful
26. events, which they condemn
27. wholeheartedly, they too are
28. beginning to feel a huge sense of

67 Chomsky (2001) notes the terms used by Bush to denote actions following 9/11, and points out the assets of the vague designation ‘war’.

The statement does not stand alone. The MCB, speaking for British Muslims, does not just condemn the attacks, it does so ‘along with everyone else’. Blair, representing the Great Britain, ‘stood shoulder to shoulder’ with the ‘American friends’ (extract 1, line 26-27); MCB stands ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with remarks of Tony Blair (extract 2, lines 12-14). (The alliance has limits.) Not knowing the perpetrators is also significant – denying privileged knowledge sets British Muslims apart from the attackers. The statement thus attends first to the participant position of the MCB and does this, so to speak performatively, by acting in spirit. MCB is joining the dialogical network initiated by Blair’s calling for allies in the ‘war on terror’. The MCB statement endorses Blair’s formulation of the conflict (a dialogical connection) without specifying exactly which remarks it responds to. This is common in dialogical networks – remarks are grouped together and responded to jointly rather each individually. There are some obvious textual affinities between the statements (1) and (2). Both represent the attacks in similar terms (‘horror’, ‘carnage’), both offer ‘sympathy’ and ‘prayers’. Analysing the links between Bush and Blair’s statements we observed that Blair did not simply reproduce Bush’s statement, he amplified it in certain respects (Leudar, Marsland and Nekvapil, 2004) Blair’s assessment of the events is likewise somewhat amplified in the MCB statement – ‘horror’ for instance becomes ‘shock and horror’; and attacks are described as ‘dreadful wanton destruction’.

The MCB statement, however, does not simply echo and amplify Blair’s formulations. It positions Muslims as victims - these victims cannot be treated as perpetrators, and the ‘war on terror’ cannot
simply be a conflict between Christianity and Islam (as Osama bin Laden claims.) The MCB statement also warns against ‘knee jerk reactions’. The victims of these are not specified, but they obviously include Muslims in the UK whom the MCB represents. The MCB statement then does two things in the dialogical network. It fulfils Blair’s argument that the conflict is not between Islam and Christianity. Second, from the position of an ally, the MCB works to defend Muslims in the UK and elsewhere.

The design of Blair’s statement then only becomes obvious as the dialogical network unfolds. He defines the 9/11 attacks and their perpetrators so as to allow Muslims into an alliance; once they are in, he uses their voices to continue to dissociate religion from the conflict. The lesson for the analyst is that one can only properly understand political statements by noting their uptake elsewhere; in our terms understanding them in a dialogical network.

Blair used the MCB statement in a press conference at 10 Downing Street the next day.

(3) Press conference, Downing Street, 12/09/01

1. Blair statement
2. ((28 lines omitted))
3. … the world now knows the full evil
4. and capability of international
5. terrorism which menaces the whole of
6. the democratic world. The terrorists
7. responsible have no sense of
8. humanity, of mercy, or of justice. To
9. commit acts of this nature requires a
10. fanaticism and wickedness that is
11. beyond our normal contemplation.
12. The USA will be considering the
13. action it considers appropriate against
14. those found to be responsible. But
15. beyond that, there are issues
16. connected with such terrorism that the
17. international community as a whole
18. must consider: where these groups are,
19. how they operate, how they are
20. financed, how they are supported, and
21. how they are stopped. One final point.
22. I was pleased to see the very strong
23. statement of condemnation from the
24. British Muslim Council, echoing that
25. of the American Muslim Council. As
26. Muslim leaders and clerics around the
27. world are making clear, such acts of
28. infamy and cruelty are wholly
29. contrary to the Islamic faith. The vast
30. majority of Muslims are decent,
31. upright people who share our horror at
32. what has happened. People of all
33. faiths and all democratic political
34. persuasions have a common cause: to
35. identify this machinery of terror and to
36. dismantle it as swiftly as possible.
37. With our American friends, and other
38. allies around the world, this is the task
39. to which we now turn.

The alliance is now explicitly opened to ‘people of all faiths’ and Blair stresses the variety of its membership – of political systems (he says not ‘democratic persuasion’ but ‘persuasions’) and of mode of religious faith (‘all faiths’). The actual presence in the alliance of Muslims is demonstrated by the statement of the MCB, which Blair makes relevant. Note, though, a small discrepancy. The MCB, representing British Muslims, rejected the attacks along with everyone else and ‘standing shoulder to shoulder’ with Blair. Blair, however, presents it as a spontaneous reaction to the 9/11 attacks and groups it with the like reaction by the American Muslim Council (line 25), and then attributing it to Muslim leaders and clerics in general (contrast extract 2, lines 11-14 and extract 3, lines 26, 27). He is, moreover, not just talking about Muslims but with Muslim ‘leaders and clerics’ and dissociates Islam from the attacks in their voices. Blair of course does not speak just in the voice of his Muslim allies. ‘The vast majority of Muslims are decent, upright people who share our horror at what has happened’ is in his own voice, he holds this view.

Blair then takes two steps to safeguard Muslims in the UK from the backlash. One
is to dissociate Islam from the attacks, the other is to endorse most Muslims. The former is done in the voice of his allies and has to be done in a dialogical network. The latter is done in his own voice and in principle does not require a network. Dissociating Islam from the 9/11 attacks and having Muslim representatives to condemn them might of course have other consequences than protecting Muslims from a backlash. It might, for instance, work to attenuate possible Muslim support for the attackers.

Blair’s uptake of the MCB press release is, however, selective. The point the MCB made about Muslims also being direct victims of the attacks is not taken up at all (and the MCB will reiterate it, as we shall see below). The warning against the ‘knee jerk reaction’ is arguably taken up in lines 3-14. Saying ‘The USA will be considering the action it considers appropriate against those found to be responsible.’ implies that neither Blair, nor the other allies of the USA have control over what the USA will ‘decide’ and do (the role of the allies is to provide intelligence, information and support - extract 3, lines 12-21). In using the words ‘appropriate’ and ‘consider’ to describe the eventual reaction of the USA, Blair tacitly discounts the likelihood of a ‘knee jerk reaction’. Since he, however, starts with an extreme case description of the attackers he warrants an extreme reaction by the USA, and indicates that one is to be expected.

The way Blair removes the religion from the ‘war on terror’ depends on the Muslim bodies publicly rejecting the attacks and Blair’s arguments make sense in and are contingent on this developing dialogical network – the analytic routine has to respect this.

What is notable is that Blair and the MCB not once identified the perpetrators as Muslims or of Islam avoiding expressions such as ‘Islamic terrorists’ and ‘Islamic fundamentalists’. The perpetrators are instead defined by reference to their deeds. Muslims, on the other hand, are identified by their positive moral qualities. Religious understanding of the attacks and of the ensuing conflict was, however, not to be avoided for long. The first question put to Blair in the press conference on the 12/09/02 was as follows:

(4) Press conference, Downing Street, 12/09/01
1. Q: This is maybe one of those
2. questions, Prime Minister, you can’t
3. answer but there have been official
4. and semi-official comments from the
5. United States about Osama Bin
6. Laden’s group being the likely culprit
7. for this. What is the British view of
8. that, and do we have any intelligence
9. about where these attacks came
10. from?
11. A: I won’t comment on the
12. identification of who is responsible at
13. this stage but obviously this is
14. something that is under consideration
15. by our agencies here as well as other
16. agencies round the world and
17. particularly those in the United States
18. of America. Yes, Sir.

So, the suspicion that the attacks had been carried out by Osama bin Laden’s group was gaining currency and Blair’s attempt to argue religion out of the ‘war on terror’ was challenged. The second question was as follows.

(5) Downing Street, 12/09/01
1. Q: Noting what you said about
2. Britain’s
3. Muslims, it is nonetheless the case
4. isn’t it that this international terrorism
5. over the past decade has had a
6. common thread of Islamic
7. Fundamentalism and isn’t it rather
8. inadequate to try and address this
9. problem by treating it as evil
10. terrorism and (sic) 69 isolation and
11. looking at the functionalities of where
12. the money comes from without
13. looking at the basic clash of ideologies
14. and indeed the basic concept of what

69 The word ‘and’ should presumably have been ‘in’.
15. human rights and the value of human life is?
16. A: Of course it is evil terrorism and we shouldn't disguise that for a moment but I think you are right in saying that we also have to make it clear and this is done best indeed by voices within the Muslim community and the Islamic faith that such acts of wickedness and terrorism are wholly contrary to the proper principles of the Islamic faith. And one of the reasons I mentioned the statement of the Muslim Council of Britain was in order to underscore the shock and the sense of horror and sense of outrage felt by the vast majority of Muslims round the world. So this is not a situation in which we should see this as a cause between the Muslim faith and the world but between terrorism and the rest of the world, including the Muslim faith.

The journalist tentatively accepts the dissociation of ‘Britain’s Muslims’ from the attacks, but argues that the motivation is likely to have been ‘Islamic fundamentalism’, suggesting that Blair’s understanding of the conflict is inadequate (it ignores the ‘basic clash of ideologies’, the contrary conceptions of ‘human rights’ and the values put on ‘human life’.) Blair rejects the criticism - the identity of perpetrators relevant to the 9/11 attacks is not that they are ‘Muslims’ but that they are ‘evil terrorists.’ Blair argues that such acts of terrorism are against ‘proper principles of the Islamic faith’ (misattributing this view to the journalist – line 19). Important for our analysis is that, as in (3), Blair supports his argument not by his own exegesis of Islam but by pointing out that the Muslim community, represented by the MCB, publicly strongly condemns the attacks as against Islam.

Blair is not himself in a position to declare who is and who is not a proper Muslim – hence he speaks in the voices of his Muslim allies, reporting what they have said.

Events external to the press conference are thus crucial for understanding what Blair does in the press conference. The important point is that in referring to and quoting statements, Blair himself indicates which external events are relevant and hence should be included by us in the analysis.

Blair’s press conference statement was referred to in many, if not all British national dailies. The Guardian reported it as follows:

(6) The Guardian, 12/09/01, 1.15pm update 71
((26 lines omitted))
1. The prime minister was also quick to stress that this was not a battle between Islam and the west. He said that such acts of terrorism were "wholly contrary to the proper principles of the Islamic faith". "This is not a situation in which we should see this as a cause between the Muslim faith and the world, but between terrorism and the rest of the world, including the Muslim faith."

There are some discrepancies in what Blair said and what he was reported to have said - for instance, ‘such acts of wickedness and terrorism’ (extract 5, lines 23, 24) became ‘such acts of terrorism’, editing out the moral/religious dimension. What Blair said in counter-argument to a journalist is presented as his non-contingent view and broadcast to all and sundry and nobody in particular. This is a characteristic role of journalists in dialogical networks – they make local arguments public and redirect them. Leudar and Nekvapil (1998) noted how a relatively geographically hidden

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70 The journalist’s argument brings up an interesting point about Blair’s construction of the attackers – they are defined entirely in terms of what they have done on 9/11 and then in terms of the physical and moral impact of their acts; they have almost no other ‘qualities’. The journalist, on the other hand, provides a broader description which would clarify the intentions in the attacks.

71 See http://www.guardian.co.uk/wtccrash/story/0,550619,00.html
press conference became a significant event when the elements of it were reported by journalists and brought to politicians for comment. More importantly, however, Blair’s careful rhetoric seems to be lost on the Guardian journalist - the view Blair expressed using voices of Muslim ‘leaders and clerics’ is simply attributed to him as his own and his point that it is Muslims who are rejecting the attacks does not carry.

The second statement of the MCB again in part fulfils Blair’s argument. In (3), Blair said that Muslim leaders are making it clear that such acts of infamy are ‘contrary to Islamic faith’ and in (7) they do just that (extract 7, lines 3-5). He declares that Muslim leaders condemn the attacks (extract 3, lines 26-29) and here they do so (extract 7, lines 11-13).

(7) Muslim Council of Britain 13/09/01
1. MCB expresses total condemnation of
2. terrorist attacks in US
3. The Holy Qur'an equates the murder
4. of one innocent person with the
5. murder of the whole of humanity.
6. We, the Muslims of Britain, wish to
7. offer our deepest sympathies to the
8. families of those who have been killed
9. or injured following the atrocities
10. committed in the United States.
11. We utterly condemn these
12. indiscriminate terrorist attacks against
13. innocent lives. The perpetrators of
14. these atrocities, regardless of their
15. religious, ideological or political
16. beliefs, stand outside the pale of
17. civilized values.

The statement subtly differentiates the MCB from the attackers. The latter are presented as being without civilised values and the MCB, by implication, is upholding these. The attackers are however not necessarily devoid of religion (lines 13-15). Their creed, ideology or politics are, however, irrelevant to, and do not excuse, the attacks.

Having denounced the attacks and the attackers, however, the MCB statement reinstates the point that Blair did not take up - Muslims are victims of terrorism, and therefore not perpetrators (extract 8, lines 18-21), and so should not be further victimized.

(8) Muslim Council of Britain 13/09/01
18. Terror affects us all. Terror of this
19. enormity must not be compounded by
20. knee-jerk reactions that would make
21. victims of other innocent people. We
22. would remind the government and the
23. media that the consequences of
24. unsubstantiated speculation in the
25. past, such as the case of the Oklahoma
26. bombing, produced a climate of fear
27. among Muslims that should not be
28. repeated.

Compare this to what MCB said in its first statement:

(9) Muslim Council of Britain 11/09/01
27. they too are beginning to feel a huge
28. sense of fear. Terror makes victims of
29. us all, it is beyond reason. Terror on
30. this scale must not be compounded by
31. knee-jerk reactions that would make
32. victims of other innocent peoples

Both texts position Muslims as victims of terrorism, ‘along with everyone else’ (extract 8, line 18 and extract 9, lines 28,29). Muslims are, however, in addition potentially victims of backlash, ‘knee jerk reactions’. Psychologically in fact they are victims already - in fearing such knee jerk reactions. There is a significant difference between the two MCB press releases, understandable in the network sequence. The second statement does not just warn of a backlash but also provides an instance (i.e. what happened in the aftermath of the Oklahoma bombing.) Providing the instance amplifies the previously ignored point. The fear and warning implicit in Blair’s comments is made explicit and documented.

There is also an indication that the representatives of Muslims are less
sanguine than Blair about the effectiveness of dissociating the Islam from the attacks as a means of safeguarding their community.

(10) Muslim Council of Britain 13/09/01
29. There exists a heightened sense of
30. insecurity amongst Muslims in Britain
31. though we warmly welcome our
32. Prime Minister's comments yesterday
33. when he emphasised that Muslims in
34. this country clearly condemn this
35. atrocity. The Prime Minister warned
36. against speculation that can endanger
37. the lives of the entire community.
38. Our thoughts and heartfelt concerns
39. are with all those affected at this
40. mournful moment.

The defence of British Muslims against the backlash is thus managed jointly by Blair and the Muslim representatives interactively in the dialogical network. Let us summarise this network so far. Two interactions were distributed in the press conferences and press releases. One can be glossed as follows: Blair and the MCB are taking religion in general and Islam in particular out of the 9/11 attacks: Blair asserted that Muslims condemn the attacks and the MCB did so; he then publicly welcomed the condemnation and used it in subsequent argument. The second interaction involved the MCB warning against knee-jerk reactions which would make Muslims double victims in the ‘war on terror’. Blair here responded only weakly and in part and MCB reiterated the point in its second statement. This is not a theoretical piece, but let us draw out a point implicit in this analysis. The sequence of activities that supervenes on face-to-face interactions is readily understandable in terms of the same pragmatic categories that we find in face to face conversations – one does not have to formulate abstract, previously unnoticed social structures. We have shown elsewhere that dialogical networks are partly understandable in terms of standard adjacency pairs and three-part sequences (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004). The turn-allocation mechanism (cf. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974), however, does not seem to operate in dialogical networks.

The next crucial happening in the dialogical framework was Blair’s statement to the House of Commons and the ensuing debate. Our analysis of the statement’s dialogical connections and textual affinities with speeches of G.W. Bush and Osama bin Laden is available in Leudar, Marsland, Nekvapil (2004). What concerns us here is how Blair managed the religious aspects of the events, and how the representatives of British Muslims responded. The responses we shall analyse are (1) those by two MPs with Muslim connections (Khalid Mahmood and Mohammad Sarwar), (2) a further press release by the MCB and finally (3) an article in Muslim News.

(11) Hansard, 14/9/2001: Column 604
82. The Prime Minister: We do not yet
83. know the exact origin of this evil.
84. But if, as appears likely, it is so
85. called Islamic fundamentalists, we
86. know that they do not speak or act
87. for the vast majority of decent law-
88. abiding Muslims throughout the
89. world. I say to our Arab and
90. Muslim friends: "Neither you nor
91. Islam is responsible for this; on the
92. contrary, we know you share our
93. shock at this terrorism, and we ask
94. you as friends to make common
95. cause with us in defeating this
96. barbarism that is totally foreign to
97. the true spirit and teachings of
98. Islam."

Hitherto, Blair systematically denied that the motivation for the attacks was in Islam and that the perpetrators were Muslims - they were ‘terrorists’ and defined in terms of consequences of their deeds on 9/11. At the press conference on 12/09 Blair avoided denoting the attackers as ‘Islamic fundamentalists’; here, however, they become ‘so called Islamic fundamentalists’ indicating that that may be a view at large. Blair used the expression with reluctance and in somebody else’s voice; even so he introduced the possibility that the attacks were religiously motivated.
Hitherto the attackers were not simply Muslims, now Blair dissociates the terrorism from Islam by dividing Islam properly understood from the false Islam of the ‘so called Islamic fundamentalists.’ In fact, Blair presents the attacks as being caused by ‘perversion of religious feeling’ (line 9). Blair’s formulation of the attacks and the enemy then still draws away from religion but less resolutely – a Muslim can be a friend or a foe and the attackers could have been religiously motivated. It is now the status of the religious motivation that is downgraded – it is a wrong understanding, a perversion. In this formulation, the West and the Muslim world are not divided by the attacks, but the Muslim world is fragmented.

Who, though, is Blair’s argument for? - there is no single audience. He speaks to those present in the House, but the argument is also publicly available - in full to anybody with access to Hansard and Cable TV, and abridged in media reports. (We have already considered one Guardian report, extract 6.) Blair statement assumes that his arguments will be reported widely - he directs some of his comments to his ‘Arab and Muslim friends throughout the world’. This expression sets up a category with an open and partly self-selecting incumbency (cf. Kühn 1995). What concerns us now is how Blair’s arguments were taken up by Muslims. Khalid Mahmood represents a constituency with a large Muslim population in Birmingham and responded to Blair in the House of Commons.

Mahmood’s contribution to the parliamentary debate is designed for an audience prepared to believe the worst about Muslims - are they complicit in the attacks? This is not surprising, since at the time the national press drew controversial statements out of some Islamic militants in the UK, and reactions in Palestine and Iran celebrating the attacks were publicised in the British national press. The sequential character of Mahmood’s parliamentary question is contingent - he starts by managing his participant position in the conflict. He condemns the attacks on the United States, with his formulation of the events echoing Blair’s (line 365-367). He is a Muslim, represents Muslims and is condemning the attacks. This condemnation needs to be understood not in isolation but in the dialogical network. Mahmood fulfils Blair’s point that the attacks did not result from Islam – but he is not the first Muslim to do so, the MCB did so previously. Having managed his participant position, Mahmood uses it to characterize Muslims as victims (this point has also been made by the MCB, see excerpts 2, 8, 9), and asks for a reassurance from the Prime Minister that he does not hold Muslims in general to be responsible for the attacks. Note that he does this as an ally. His description of the attacks
resonates that of Blair, and the possibility that the attackers were Muslim is left open. In other words, Mahmood does not argue that the attacks were nothing whatsoever to do with Islam. His concern is local, and his strategy is to dissociate ‘British Muslims’ from the attacks - they should not be ‘tarred with the same brush’ (line 373). Blair implies that the attackers’ motivation was a perversion of Islam and Mahmood does not reject the implication that the motivation came from Islam. In his reply in the House of Commons, Blair takes up and develops Mahmood's representation of British Muslims.

(14) Hansard, 14/9/2001: Column 604
375. The Prime Minister:
376. I thank my hon. Friend for his words. He
377. speaks on behalf of many Muslims in
378. this country when he says that they
379. share the shock and horror at this
380. outrage. The fact that the Muslim
381. Council of Britain issued a statement of
382. such strength and so quickly indicates
383. what we know to be true: that those who
384. truly follow the religion of Islam are
385. decent, peaceful and law-abiding people.
386. Like us, they have often been victims
387. of terrorism and, like us, they want it
388. stamped out.

He recognizes Mahmood’s position in the House - ‘he speaks on behalf of many Muslims in this country’. He thus accepts the understanding of the events Mahmood voices not as his own only but also as that of others of his faith. Blair in effect uses Mahmood's intervention together with the statement of the Muslim Council of Britain as evidence for his claim that those who truly follow the religion of Islam could not have carried out the attacks. Blair and Mahmood then both acknowledge that the attackers may have been religiously motivated, but their ‘Islam’ is a perversion, and they both explicitly distance the majority of Muslims from them. So as we argued elsewhere, the category ‘Muslims’ becomes a heterogeneous collection.

This three-part exchange between Blair and Mahmood is not a private matter – it is in the public domain. In public view, Mahmood aligns British Muslims with Blair and in doing so provides the evidence for Blair’s argument that Islam is not intrinsically related to the attacks. Blair groups together the reactions of different Muslim representatives distributed in time and space and uses them jointly to document Muslim reaction to the events. What Blair and Mahmood say has to be understood not simply as an encapsulated face to face interaction in the House but as a part of a dialogical network. Talk issued in different places is collated and broadcast to multiple audiences at the same time, and one designs contributions in alignment with other contributions in the network. Note also that even though Blair refers to ‘a statement’ of the MCB he does not specify which one; this is not important, and in fact Blair could have been responding to either statement by the Muslim Council of Britain on 11th or 13th of September. Both take up Blair’s invitation to join his position in the conflict.

We have noted that when the MCB presented Muslims as victims of terrorism and possibly of a backlash, they did not get a clear response from Blair. Mahmood reiterates both points and now Blair accepts that Muslims (or at least some of them) have also been victims of terrorism, characterizing them as ‘decent, peaceful and law abiding people’ (extract 14, lines 383-385). The question then is, why does Blair answer now, but ignored the point when it was put to him by MCB? There are several possibilities, which are not mutually exclusive. One is that when the question is put to him in a face to face situation, he is obliged to respond. The obligation is produced by the turn allocation system, which operates in face to face conversations but not in dialogical networks. (These are distributed and not constrained by ‘one person speaks at a time’ and ‘next turn allocation’ rules – see Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004; cf. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974.) Not responding to the question as put by
Mahmood would be hearable in Parliament as not agreeing that Muslims can be victims of terrorism and backlash.

Blair could also be taking up the point now for an additional reason– we observed that in dialogical networks politicians do not respond to single questions but only when these have been duplicated several times (see Nekvapil and Leudar, 2002b).

Mohammad Sarwar is another member of the House of Commons with Muslim links.

(15) Hansard, 14/9/2001: Column 634
1. Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan):
2. It is hard to comprehend or to come to terms with the tragic and staggering death toll that has been inflicted upon the American people and those of other nations. Our hearts and our thoughts are with all those who have lost friends and family. People of all nationalities and faiths have perished in this meaningless atrocity. I speak on behalf of my constituents, and undoubtedly on behalf of the Muslim community in this country and beyond, when I say that this barbaric and inhumane terrorist atrocity must be condemned unreservedly.

Like Blair, the MCB and Mahmood, Sarwar endeavours to forestall the victimisation of the Muslim community in the UK. He begins his statement by establishing his participant position in the conflict by denouncing the attacks (lines 2-8), speaking for his constituents and the Muslims in the U.K. and beyond (lines 10-13) - Khalid Mahmood spoke just for the British Muslims. The denouncement sets these Muslims apart from Osama bin Laden, whose group is suspected to have carried out the attacks (extract 4) and who three weeks later declared that God was the agent or principal of the attacks (Leudar, Marsland and Nekvapil 2004). Sarwar includes Muslims amongst the victims of the attacks, as the MCB did (lines 8-9), and, in addition, he is cautious about joining the 'war on terror'.

(16) Hansard, 14/9/2001: Column 634
16. Mr. Mohammad Sarwar:
17. We would solidly support all legitimate efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice. Whoever the culprits turn out to be, it is critical that we send a clear message that they cannot possibly claim to represent the true interests of any religious or ethnic group. In the recent past we have seen how hysteria can be whipped up at times of tragedy and the corrosive effect that that has on society. It is for that reason that I support the Prime Minister in his clear message about the danger of stereotyping communities, particularly the Muslim community. With those words, my right hon. Friend has given comfort to people in this country and across the world. It is critical that, in giving support to any action, we do so observing the principles of justice and within the framework of international law. We must naturally give our support to our American allies, but we must counsel against unilateral action. We must avoid action that could result in the deaths of thousands of other innocent civilians, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence. We cannot afford to isolate any of our allies in finding solutions, and in particular, if there is evidence that Osama bin Laden is responsible, our allies who recognize the Taliban Government—namely, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates—will be crucial to influencing the situation.

He conditionally supports ‘legitimate efforts’ to bring the perpetrators to justice. Such efforts are those based on principles of justice and in accord with international laws (lines 32-36). This is what ‘unilateral action’ (i.e. the war against terrorism) would side step. The position of the Muslim community in Britain as represented by Sarwar is thus potentially complex. They denounce the attacks and the attackers alongside with Blair and Bush. They however expect and are opposed to inappropriate responses to those acts in the future which would victimize the innocent and alienate potential allies.
We have already noted that Blair was unwilling to analyse the broader causes of the attacks. SARWAR does exactly this. His representation of the intentionality of the attacks is worthy of note.

(17) Hansard, 14/9/2001: Column 634
51. Mr. Mohammad Sarwar: It is a difficult
52. time, but I believe that it is the right
53. time to examine more deeply our role
54. and responsibilities in the world.
55. We must attempt to understand why
56. some extremists feel driven to the
57. abhorrent madness that we have
58. witnessed in New York and
59. Washington. There can be no
60. justification for this vulgar terrorist
61. atrocity, but we cannot be blind to the
62. plight of oppressed people who look to
63. Europe and the USA for support. As a
64. former colonial power we have a
65. special responsibility. We should use
66. our influence with the Americans and
67. other allies to redouble our efforts in
68. search of a just solution to the
69. outstanding issues in the middle east
70. and other parts of the world. This brutal
71. terrorist attack is profoundly contrary
72. to the doctrine of Islam and has been
73. strongly condemned by Muslim states,
74. Muslim clerics and individual Muslims
75. throughout the world. I can only
76. reiterate that condemnation and, on
77. behalf of all my constituents, express
78. my hope that the international
79. community can achieve justice for the
80. innocent victims and their grieving
81. families.

Up to this point in the network the attacks were presented as caused by absent moral ‘qualities’ of the perpetrators, and their religious perversions. In Sarwar’s account individual features are still present, but they result from something else – the ‘terrorists’ felt ‘driven to the abhorrent madness’. There is both a delicacy and ambiguity to this statement – he does not say they were driven (which would in effect excuse them) but they ‘felt they were driven’ (but was this feeling just a part of madness and completely unjustified?). So, without excusing the attacks and shifting the blame, he distributes the blame, presenting the attacks as carried out in abhorrent madness caused by oppression (lines 55-62). Note further that UK and USA are not presented as the agents of the oppression but as potential agents of remedy (lines 62-70). The reaction to the attacks should be not just retribution but also attending to the deeper causes.

Notice the sequencing of Sarwar’s contribution: he (1) establishes his participant position and only then (2) he objects to reprisals that would victimize the innocents and topologizes the problem of the broader causes of the attacks; then (3) he re-establishes his participant position (as one of ‘us’ – lines 70-76). The disagreement with Blair and Bush is done from within the membership category, it is a matter of internal variation to be accommodated without affecting Sarwar’s incumbency. Clearly, in dialogical networks, the analysis of the membership category work and the analysis of sequencing cannot be divorced from each other. As in face-to-face conversations, establishing a participant position is a precondition for doing things but it is also produced by doing things (see Watson, 1976; 1997).

Khalid Mahmood contributed once more to the debate, later on the same day. He already spoke once to dissociate British Muslims from the attacks in his previous contribution to the parliamentary debate (excerpt 13). Now he provides an extended biographic narrative sharing his experience of the 9/11 attacks as they happened.

(18) Hansard, 14/9/2001: Column 649
1. Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry
2. Barr): On Tuesday evening, I sat with my
3. family in my home in Birmingham,
4. watching television with increasing horror
5. and revulsion as the pictures from New
6. York and Washington were repeatedly
7. shown. We watched the images of an

72 Blair did not respond to Sarwar’s contribution - only the British secretary of defence J. Hoon did. He just acknowledged the need to maintain allies in the Muslim world and his speech thus need not be subjected to a detailed analysis here.
Having established the place of the Muslim community in UK society, Mahmood turns to the religious uniqueness of that community. It sets them apart, but the difference is immaterial with respect to 9/11 attacks.

(20) Hansard, 14/9/2001: Column 649

50. People look at me and ask what my
51. religion is. It is not the religion of the
52. people who carried out that act. My
53. religion is the religion that believes in
54. peace and harmony. Above all, I am
55. British—and, in fact, a Brummie,
56. having been brought up in
57. Birmingham and having lived there.

The danger for the British Muslim community is that they will be put together with the attackers on the basis of the common religion, especially if that religion is understood as motivating the attacks. Mahmood therefore (1) differentiates his from the attackers’ religion, and dissociates his religion from the attacks. His Islam is a peace loving religion (extract 20, lines 54). In fact, he specifically brings the Muslim identity of the attackers into doubt – ‘they purport to be Muslims’ (extract 19, line 34-6).

Mahmood works explicitly to prevent a backlash against British Muslims. The second MCB statement reminded us of the backlash following the Oklahoma bombing. Mahmood recounts a terrorist attack in Birmingham and the subsequent backlash against the Irish Catholic community and their representatives.

(21) Hansard, 14/9/2001: Column 649

58. Birmingham faced similar problems in
59. 1974, when a building there was bombed
60. by the IRA. Councillor John O’Keefe, a
61. prominent member of the Sparkbrook
62. community, was focused on by the rest
63. of the community because he was Irish.
64. It was not because he had any links with
65. the IRA or anybody else. He had settled
66. in Birmingham and wanted to play a part
67. in society there, but he was picked on
68. because of his Irish heritage.
Blair’s, Mahmood’s and Sarwar’s arguments did not remain without impact elsewhere. They were reported, evaluated and used. On the 18th of September, the MCB issued its third statement, assessing the strategy to forestall the backlash by taking religion out of the conflict. This statement acknowledges and appreciates Blair’s attempts, but they are obviously not enough.

(22) Muslim Council of Britain 18/09/01
1. Statement by the Muslim Council of Britain on the occasion of the special House of Commons Debate
2. ((7 lines omitted))
3. Muslims in Britain and around the world feel a huge sense of fear, vulnerability and insecurity in the wake of Tuesday’s awful events.
4. Commendably the Prime Minister said "...this is not a situation in which we should see this as a cause between the Muslim faith and the world, but between terrorism and the rest of the world, including the Muslim faith."
5. However, anti-Muslim sentiments are manifesting themselves in both calls for retribution against Muslim states and by anti-Muslim attacks here in Britain. ((17 lines omitted))

This statement is explicitly indexed to more than one event in the network. It is issued specifically for the occasion of the debate, to accompany it, but it reacts to what Blair said at the press conference. The quote is from what Blair said at the press conference on 12th and what was also reported in the Guardian (see above).

Another relevant newspaper article was published in The Muslim News on 28/9/2001. It summarizes in detail the strategy of Blair and Muslim representatives to forestall the backlash, explicitly presenting the condemnations of the attacks as attempts to safeguard the Muslim community (note the text in lines 30-33). 73

73 The Muslim News is a monthly and the issue of 28/9/2001 we use here was the first issue after 9-11.
52. Muslims. Some MPs in constituencies with
53. sizeable Muslim populations, like former
54. Foreign Office Minister John Battle from
55. Leeds voiced concern against the blame
56. being put on Islam and called for a
57. deepening of the traditions and religions in
58. Britain and internationally.
((35 lines follow))

The article collects statements which were
voiced on different occasions: in
Parliament (Mahmood, Sarwar), at the
Downing Street press conference (Blair)
and at the press conference by Muslim
Council of Britain on the 11th September.
The author not only quotes from
Mahmood’s and Sarwar’s speeches, but he
also interprets fragments of them as
‘warnings’, in particular with regard to the
important role of the media in the
impending conflict. Importantly, he
mentions those actors and settings which
we as analysts included in our analysis
presented above. This indicates that our
analysis of the dialogical network is not
arbitrary but something participants
themselves oriented to (in detail, see
Nekvapil and Leudar 2002b). As is
obvious from the article, our analysis
however dealt only with a fragment of the
dialogical network. We didn’t pay any
attention, for instance, to ‘chairman of the
Nahda Party of Tunisia’, ‘Muslim Welfare
House’, ‘Council of Mosques in Tower
Hamlets’, ‘former Foreign Office Minister
John Battle from Leeds’ and other actors
mentioned in the rest of Chapman’s article
(not cited above). This is not surprising as
we dealt with verbal reactions related to an
event which has become a part of world
history – no paper can cover all
contributions to such a dialogical network.

Concluding remarks

1. Following the 9/11 attacks there was an
immediate and concerted effort to
foresetall a backlash against the Muslim
community in the U.K. Prime Minister
Blair’s strategy was to set apart religion
and terrorism, denying that the attacks
were religiously motivated, thus
securing allies for the ‘war on terror’ to

2. These interactions supervened on a set
of face-to-face interactions – press
conferences, press releases and debates
in the House of Commons. The role of
the media in general was to make each
face-to-face interaction public. The role
of newspapers was specifically to
summarize the network interactions for
the public, and to assess their
effectiveness.

3. Our analysis indicates that in political
discourse that is contingent on violent
contlict, it is always necessary to pay
attention concurrently to both
pragmatic and membership
categorization aspects of interactions.
Muslim representatives were obliged
scrupulously to establish and maintain
their participant identities as
quintessentially British, opponents of
terrorism and allies of Blair/Bush, and
to make any potentially controversial
points from within that membership
category. This subsequently reproduced
their membership.

4. This indicates that social identity needs
to be conceived in a situated manner,
paying attention to how it is managed
in situ rather than to how such
categories are psychologically
represented and the function they may
have in reducing ‘information
overload’ (cf. e.g. Antaki and

5. We observed that dialogical networks
are (partly) organized in the same
structures as face-to-face
conversations, i.e. adjacency pairs and
three part sequences. These structures
are, however, not quite adjacent or
‘local’ – the first part need not be followed by the second part in the here-and-now, but in a different place and after a day or more. The fact that network interactions are distributed in time and space means that the turn-taking mechanism cannot operate and the relevance of participants’ activities is accomplished through addressivity markers. This allows parts of conversational structures to be duplicated, meaning that, for instance, a single question can receive a multiple answer, and an answer can be not to a single question but to several questions collated. As a result, the obligation to perform second parts of adjacency pairs is attenuated.

6. There are methodological advantages in using the concept of a network. It is required to understand the behaviour of participants in face-to-face interactions in public. It enabled us to analyze in a joined way very different formats of discourse. We attempted to collect a relatively complete corpus so that it would reflect orientations of the participants to each other. For this reason we restricted ourselves to the public domain without interrogating the participants about interactions hidden from the media and the public. Even so, we did miss some local events, which would have completed the record of the network.

References


