“Core Values-Timeout”? (Sw. Värdegrundsttimeout)

A Counter-Hegemonic Discursive Device in Police Jargon

Malin Sefton

PhD Candidate
Department of Religious Studies
Faculty of Arts and Education
Karlstad University
Sweden
Malin.sefton@kau.se
Introduction

- Examine the police students’ understanding of “core values timeout” and its function in relation to the Police Core Values and their professional practice

- **Background**
  - Experiences from the field
  - The ”core values timeout” presented (canteen cop culture)
  - Navigating between double discourses (school and practice)
Theoretical framework (pluralism)

- Explorative design
- Abductive approach – dialectic relation between data and theory

- Social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann)
- Sociocultural perspective on learning (Mercer; Säljö; Vygotsky)
- Analysis of discourses and hegemony / counter hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe; Hall)
Methods

- Ethnographic approach – data production (Beach; Hammersly & Atkinson; Jackson; van Maanen)
- Fieldstudies at National Police Academy 2010 (6 weeks, 4th semester, 2 classes, 45 students, 34 teachers)
- Participant observation, field conversations and interviews, 5 focusgroup interviews, policy documents
- Field notes, audio recordings (class-rooms, brakes, lunches, interviews)
- Artefacts (national and local policy documents, examinations, stenciles, presentations, pictures etc.)
- 3 following up focusgroup interviews (students’ 5th semester)

- Approved by the Research Ethic Committee in Uppsala
Values and the Police force

- Increased focus due to:
  - New legislations (increased diversity on several levels)
  - Racist/discriminatory incidents and statements within the Police
The Core Values of the Swedish Police

- Committed
- Efficient
- Available
The Core Values of the Swedish Police

“Our mission is to increase safety and reduce crime. We carry out our mission in a professional manner and build trust by being:

- **Committed** – showing responsibility and respect. We assume responsibility for our work and respect the equal worth of all.
- **Efficient** – with results and development in mind. We focus on results, cooperation and continuous development.
- **Available** – to the general public and to each other. We are flexible, supportive and ready to help.”

(Swedish National Police Board, 2009)
Double discourses – a policy just as public face

- Critic on several levels:
  - Discrepancy between policy and practice
  - Purpose
  - (Lack of) implementation
  - Content
  - Significance
  - Political correctness and superficial values
  - A structure problem within the organization
  - The practice of Core Values Timeout
"Core Values Timeout" as an act of resistance?

- Originate at traineeship but spread at school
- Action and word – being politically incorrect and uttering words opposite to the police core values
- Timeout as a counter reaction to the purpose of the core values
- Against implicit values of non-discriminatory talk
- Resistance through informal jargon based on humour
Timeout as an humourmoristic jargon

- Joking and banter fundamental aspects of Police work
- Developing organisational culture and autonomy through humour
- The core values should not stop the joking and jargon
- Humour can be understood in many ways
A socio-pragmatic device - Example 1

- Emil: as I would say “come on, Kurd [referring to the Kurds as an ethnic group], let’s go” to Tara, and she would say “svenne” [referring to Swedes as an ethnic group in terms of a typical name connoting Swedishness] sort of like that...and that’s just, everybody around us knows that I have nothing against her and she has nothing against me and it’s just warm sort of

- Close relation creates space with distance to a PC talk
- Creating feelings of mutual solidarity and inclusion
- Warm = making it harmless
Example 2

- David to Lina: “it’s obvious you’re a result of affirmative action”
- Anton to Damin: “fucking trainee reserve”
- All: “we are not rasists”

- Words are context bound and considered as momentary utterances, i.e. they lack fixed meanings and are assigned different significances in different contexts.
- Relational co-existence between jargon and fellowship
Double edged device

- Humour function as normaliser
- Deviating from norms in terms of gender and ethnicity
- Social positions are marked
- Categories of group belongings are constructed
- Implicit power relations

- Humour works as a double edged socio-pragmatic device
- Creates parallel inclusion (through fellowship) and exclusion (through differentiation) practices
"Core Values-timeout" in the Police car

- Function as reinforcement of a position, not risking sanctions
- The sign exists to clarify the borders between non-allowed and allowed utterances
- The sign mark the temporary crossing of borders for what is appropriate.
- Irony requires a shared common ground among the actors
Work aspects of the timeout

• The Core Values should not silence the humour
• Humour is used to ventilate professional experiences
• ”Unprofessional” but valued because it is a means to processes experiences in a demanding and exposed profession.
• Coping strategy for boring and threatening situations
• Reinforcement of fellowship and shared experiences
• Establish group identity and handle conflicts
Backstage and frontstage (Goffman)

- Damin: /.../ it’s these jargons that are used, but there’s...damn’t there is so much we see and experience, you know so it’s a way for us to ventilate a little, to joke about it...yes, those kind of jokes are still funny you know. And if you keep it on a decent level and internally and it doesn’t get out=
Context and potential learning

- Resistance to the timeout but spread at school
- Everyday language and interaction important for
  - negotiating meanings
  - handling dilemmas
  - articulating resistance against management
  - bending formal rules and policies
Conclusion - timeout as counter hegemony

- Double discourses of policy and practice within organisation
- Meanings are negotiated (often through irony)
- Struggle of the discourse, resistance against Police Core Values
- Counter hegemony through constructions of core values as "timeout"
- Acknowledge the existence of the core values
  "People banter a lot, but they do in fact talk about it"
Timeout as counter effect

- Joking jargon as socio-pragmatic device with specific rules in the social interaction game
- Irony works as a discursive double-edged tool, with parallel practices of inclusion and exclusion
- Timeout as a result of the core values
- Based on resistance against restrictions of the jargon
- The core values contains and creates a space and consequently an effect counterworking the purpose of the “core values”
- Making non allowed behavior and non organizational values visible