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‘Would it not be better to get someone out workin?’: ‘Safe prejudice’ against Polish workers

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### **Abstract**

One recurring criticism of immigrant groups is their alleged failure to be employed and contribute to the host society. Here we examine how speakers mobilise a criticism that has attracted less research attention: that through their economic activity immigrant groups usurp others’ employment entitlements. Discourse analysis of data from seven focus group discussions about pre-Brexit Polish immigration into the UK, involving 31 UK nationals, shows that participants accomplish exclusionary outcomes in two divergent ways. The first attributes qualities to Polish workers but also makes explicit the consequences of these attributions for UK nationals, rendering speakers’ investment in such claims visible. The second relies on the production of category pairs, within which claims can be made for the category that excludes Polish workers. This use of categories comprises ‘safe prejudice’, a form of prejudice not previously identified but which is less open to challenge than other forms of prejudiced talk.

Keywords: Safe prejudice, Immigration; Polish immigrants; Employment; Exclusion;  
Discourse analysis

## Introduction

There has been a considerable volume of work in recent years that has pointed to how speakers discursively manage talk that might be heard as prejudiced against minority groups. A consistent finding is that individuals commonly do not deploy talk that is overtly prejudiced, in expressing unqualified negative views of outgroups, but instead frame their talk in ways that present the view being expressed as reasonable and justified and that thereby potentially at least make claims against minority groups less likely to attract challenge on the grounds of prejudice. For example, Kadianaki, Andreouli and Carretero (2017) point to how differing representations of national history may be mobilized to present a more or less exclusionary account of immigration into the nation state. As however Howarth and Andreouli (2016, p.12) point out, such talk is not without its risks: arguments that rely upon banal assumptions about national homogeneity, and on everyday expectations that citizens should be 'similar [and] share the same values to get along' may produce oppositional and self-exclusionary responses amongst immigrants themselves. The grounds offered for negative views of outgroups, thus themselves open up possibilities for challenge.

Notwithstanding, however, the possibilities for challenge that such talk might make available, an ever-growing body of work has examined how speakers draw upon discursive strategies that are designed to mitigate these possibilities. Augoustinos and Every (2007) propose that there are five identifiable strategies that speakers draw upon towards such an end, namely (i) the 'denial of prejudice'; (ii) 'grounding one's views as reflecting the external world: reason and rationality'; (iii) 'positive self and negative other presentation'; (iv) discursive deracialisation and; (v) 'liberal arguments for "illiberal" ends'. These of course are not wholly distinct or mutually exclusive strategies: speakers can readily combine two or more in their attempts to avoid accusations of prejudice. Nonetheless, individually and

together these forms of talk provide flexible and diverse means by which individuals can seek to 'dodge the identity of prejudice' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p.211).

One form of argument directed at minority groups that potentially reflects several of the strategies identified by Augoustinos and Every (2007) relies on economic grounds. A recurring criticism levied against members of minority groups is that through not being in employment they fail to contribute to the societies in which they live. For most citizens, being in employment is treated as a normative state of affairs with individuals being required to account for any perceived failure such as being out of work (Gibson 2011; McVittie, McKinlay & Widdicombe, 2008). Applied to members of minority groups, failure to work becomes an accountable matter. Thus, by drawing on this form of explanatory discourse, prejudiced conclusions can be presented as flowing from economic factors as a specific form of factual circumstances. For example, Augoustinos and colleagues reveal that talk about liberal values such as extolling the virtues of hard work as a means of bettering oneself and the possibility for anyone to succeed on merit can be deployed to argue against affirmative action to address inequalities and to justify the unequal economic outcomes of minority groups (Augoustinos, Tuffin & Every, 2005). As a result, Australian Aboriginals who fail to gain employment are portrayed as receiving financial benefits 'handed to them on a sort of plate' (Augoustinos & Every, 2007, p.129). Similarly, van Dijk (1992, p.103) noted that immigrants to the United Kingdom (UK) were commonly characterised in the British press in terms of their lack of economic contribution to the country and consequent dependence upon financial benefits provided by the state. In particular, he cites the example of one British newspaper (Daily Mail) that described some immigrants as 'scrounger(s) who want a free ride at our expense'. In this way, British people can be attributed with 'traditions of fairness and tolerance' that are open to abuse and manipulation by others who do not share such meritorious values.

As Capdevila and Callaghan (2008) note, arguments of this sort can be mobilized not only to argue against the presence of immigrants in the UK but to contrast these immigrants with other potential immigrants who it is argued would be welcome in the host society. In an analysis of a speech by the former leader of the UK Conservative Party, Michael Howard, Capdevila and Callaghan (2008, p. 5) point out that among other arguments, Howard argues for tolerance and acceptance of ‘people who want to work hard and make a positive contribution to our society’. Presenting the argument in this form allows Howard to formulate a claim for British virtues of tolerance in terms of potential immigrants who are not in the UK while arguing against the presence of those who are there who are portrayed as not making a positive contribution. In this way, his formulation draws upon arguments that are treated as being self-evident and in need of no warrant.

The failure to contribute through economic activity thus provides one form of criticism that can be levelled against immigrant groups. This is of course, however, not the only form of economic argument available. Recently, public discourse in the UK on immigration has focused on an alternative form of economic argument in which immigrants are positioned as being in employment and as thereby illegitimately usurping jobs from British workers (Wadsworth, Dhingra, Ottaviano & Van Reenen, 2016). In this respect, the economic contribution of one specific immigrant group, Polish people, has become especially salient. Representations of Polish workers within UK media often emphasize their positive qualities as workers in comparison with other groups of international migrants (Fomina & Frelak, 2008; Keating, 2006; Travis, 2008). Indeed, similar views have been expressed even by supporters of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) whose policies include a tough stance on immigration into the UK. Thus, the Guardian (a British daily newspaper) reports a Mr Bruce Robertson, a donor to UKIP, as stating that Polish workers are ‘hard-working, cheerful and friendly’ (Hencke, 2007). The contribution of Polish workers has,

however, not always been welcomed. For example, Baxter and Wallace (2009) noted that the influx of Polish construction workers has been described as a positive benefit to the UK economy. However, they also point out in passing to the way in which their participants drew upon more discriminatory forms of talk in noting that such contributions meant that Polish workers represented a threat to British workers in the construction industry.

The contribution of Polish people to UK society has become especially relevant in the current UK context, given the vote by UK citizens in a referendum on 23 June 2016 to leave the European Union (Brexit). While the outcome of this vote is treated as marking the desire of UK voters to curtail immigration, it is consistent with concerns about immigration expressed over many years and reflected in steps previously taken to restrict the numbers of immigrants entering the UK (Home Office, 2013). By 2016, Polish nationals represented the largest single group of immigrants into the UK with the UK's Office for National Statistics estimating that 911,000 people born in Poland were resident in the UK in that year (Office for National Statistics, 2016). Polish immigrants therefore constitute a group that is particularly relevant to the study of talk of potential contribution to the UK economy and its legitimacy.

To date, arguments based on the economic activity of immigrants, and its consequences, have received rather less research attention than talk of immigrants' economic inactivity. In studying young people's discussions of unemployment of UK nationals, Gibson (2010, 2015) noted that arguments that immigrants usurp what would otherwise have been British people's employment entitlements function to exculpate unemployed UK nationals by positioning them as 'victims' of the employment activities of immigrants. The focus of these studies, however, was primarily on understanding the consequences of such talk for UK nationals and less on how that talk worked against the immigrant group. More recently, in an interview study conducted with UK nationals who were looking for work, Sambaraju, McVittie, Goodall and McKinlay (2017, p.664) found that participants dismissed suggestions

that they might be victims of immigrants' economic activities as 'just an excuse people are just using these days', and did not attribute their lack of employment success to any economic activities of immigrants. There remains therefore a need for further examination of how talk of economic activity can be used to mobilise claims and prejudice against immigrants. The aim of the present paper is to examine talk of economic activity and its consequences for understanding prejudice in the context of immigration to the UK preceding the vote for Brexit. In particular, we examine how speakers deploy talk of economic activity to argue for the exclusion of Polish workers from the UK.

## **Method**

### **Data**

The data for the present study were collected prior to the UK Government's announcement on 20 February 2016 of a referendum to be held on the question of the UK's membership of the European Union. The data were collected in Scotland's capital, Edinburgh. Scotland has a strong tradition of favouring the UK's membership of the EU and also has a strong tradition of welcoming immigration. Edinburgh itself is ethnically diverse and its population encompasses a range of minority groups with Polish immigrants being well-represented.

Data were collected across a number of ethnically homogenous different sites including workplaces and home settings. Participants in the study (15 males and 16 females) were invited to take part in semi-structured focus group discussions. They were drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds including students, employers and employees, with diverse employment histories and experiences. All were UK nationals and all focus groups comprised a mix of genders and ages. There were seven discussion groups and on average discussions lasted for approximately forty minutes. Prior to the discussions, participants were provided

with information sheets that set out the aims of study. Participants were told that they would be asked to discuss various aspects of Polish immigration into the UK. Participants were told that the aim of the research was to gather their own understandings of Polish immigration and that they could raise and respond to any topics under discussion in their own terms. The discussions were guided by a limited number of open-ended questions that invited participants to discuss various topics relating to Polish people living in the UK, including employment, housing, and relations with others. Participants were encouraged, through back-channelling (“uh huh”, “right” etc) and the use of probes where appropriate, to develop and expand their responses in order to enhance conversational flow. All discussions were audio-recorded and later transcribed, broadly in line with the conversation analytic notation system developed by Jefferson (2004). Pseudonyms were substituted for participants’ names to preserve anonymity and confidentiality - focus group discussion leaders’ contributions are marked with ‘(DL)’ in the extracts below.

As noted by previous researchers, focus group discussions are not sites of everyday naturally-occurring discourse. Rather, discussions of this sort are marked by what Puchta and Potter (2004) term the ‘interactional choreography’ of researcher and participants. One feature of course of such discussions is that they are conducted in researcher-led settings. The resulting data will, at least in part, reflect researchers’ rather than participants’ concerns, and in consequence the stakes for participants can be lower than would be found elsewhere (Stokoe, 2010). For these reasons, various writers (e.g. Edwards, 2003; Stokoe, 2010; Stokoe & Edwards, 2007) have argued in favour of analysing naturally-occurring talk instead of that produced through such methods. Here, by contrast, we treat focus group discussions as sites of social practice where discourse is occasioned within a specific form of social interaction, in line with the perspective advocated by Talmy (2011). Moreover, as Condor and colleagues (Condor, Figgou, Abell, Gibson & Stevenson, 2006) have pointed out, such interactions

provide contexts within which all of those who are co-present negotiate issues of prejudice, in particular what is to count as prejudiced or non-prejudiced talk. In the present study, the discussions provided all present (interviewer and participants) with opportunities for negotiating the attributes of Polish people living and working in the UK and responding to descriptions produced by others taking part in the focus group discussions.

### **Analysis**

Consistent with the aims of the current study, coding was conducted to identify from the transcripts all passages in which participants introduced the topic of economic contributions (or non-contributions) of Polish people, passages in which they responded to a question from the interviewer that introduced this topic, and passages in which they responded to relevant descriptions produced within the discussions. This process was conducted inclusively, with all passages of potential relevance being selected for further analysis. Extracts were then selected for detailed analysis based upon how descriptions of the contributions and other employment-related actions of Polish people were constructed and were analysed using discourse analysis (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Particular attention focused upon how speakers produced, developed, and responded to evaluations of the work-related attributes of Polish people and the outcomes of employing Polish immigrants or workers from other groups. Analysis examined also the bases that speakers provided for their arguments and how the resulting descriptions were taken up and responded to by others co-present in warranting or refuting prejudiced claims.

The study was conducted in accordance with the principles set out in the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014) and ethical approval was granted by a university ethics committee.

## Results

We noted above that a range of studies have focused on prejudiced talk that argues for excluding immigrants on the grounds of their economic inactivity while prejudiced talk grounded in economic activity has received rather less attention. In the first section below, we look at how descriptions of a migrant group as economically active, and of other groups as economically inactive, can result in disparate forms of exclusionary outcomes, depending on the comparative context in which those claims are set out. In some cases, the economically inactive are criticized because they are contrasted with the economically active. In other cases, the economically active are criticized because they cause economic inactivity in other groups. In the second section, we extend this analysis by focusing on talk about economic activity and inactivity, from which the causal framework that underpinned speakers' conclusions in the first section is absent, but which leads to similar discriminatory outcomes.

### Economic in/activity as grounds for criticism

We noted earlier Capdevila and Callaghan's (2008) finding that speakers can contrast the relative economic contributions of two immigrant groups in arguing against the presence of one group. In Extract 1 we see a description of Polish workers, as people who work hard for lower pay, that is placed in a comparative context with a different immigrant group. Extract 1 occurs at a point in the discussion where participants are responding to the question 'Do you think there is prejudice towards Polish people in the UK?'

#### Extract 1

- |   |       |  |
|---|-------|--|
| 1 | Kylie | I don't mean this to sound <u>harsh</u> but (.) >at least when< the Polish   |
| 2 |       | come over they ↓work (.) even if it's a lo:ow (.) paid job or whatever       |
| 3 |       | they ↓ <u>work</u> (.) whereas (och) so many Pakistanis or (.) come over and |

- 4 it's just like (.) on benefits (.) and (0.5) at least the Polish work hard for  
5 their money they come over and they work hard [and that is  
6 Bob [°Not on benefits°=  
7 Kylie =Yeah (.) that is like you've >got to respect< that they don't come over  
8 just to like live off British government.

Here we see a description of the industriousness of Polish workers being used as the basis for offering up a criticism of Pakistani immigrants. Kylie's immediate disclaimer at line 1, 'I don't mean this to sound harsh but', marks out the context as one of potential criticism, with her use of 'harsh' signalling that what is to follow might be heard as providing a negative evaluation of particular individuals or groups. However, the identity of this target group is not yet explicit, and instead is made out through means of a subsequent contrast between Polish people and Pakistanis. At lines 1 to 3, Kylie repeatedly attributes to 'the Polish' the feature that 'they ↓work' and works up this attribution in terms of a willingness to work, evidenced by their actions in taking up jobs that are poorly rewarded. However, at lines 3 to 4 Kylie introduces another group, 'Pakistanis'. She contrasts their actions with those that she has attributed to 'the Polish', in describing them as being 'on benefits', reflecting an absence of being engaged in paid employment and thereby criticisable in failing to make an economic contribution to UK society. It is Kylie's negative description of 'Pakistanis' that provides the basis for the claim at lines 4 to 5 that 'at least the Polish work hard for their money'. Bob's turn at line 6, 'Not on benefits', picks up on Kylie's description at line 4 of Pakistanis as being 'on benefits' and thereby heightens the contrast that Kylie has set out by indicating that while Pakistanis are on benefits, Polish people are not, thus signalling Bob's alignment with Kylie's positive description of Polish people. Following Bob's agreement,

Kylie at lines 7 to 8 repeats part of her earlier claim that Polish people are willing to work rather than being economically dependent upon the British government.

We should however note that, while Kylie offers a positive evaluation of the attributes of Polish people in working hard, she does so only in qualified terms. Her references at line 1 and line 4 to 'at least' minimise the extent of her positive evaluations of the attributes of Polish workers. Further, Kylie's claim at line 7 that 'you've >got to respect<' suggests a lack of agency on her part in arriving at this conclusion. Taken together, these qualifications allow Kylie to describe Polish workers in positive terms while at the same time limiting the extent to which she personally endorses these positive evaluations. The critical framework within which Kylie's descriptions are set, and the muted quality of her commendations of Polish workers' employment attributes, is somewhat at odds with the sort of contrasts reported by Capdevila and Callaghan (2008). Unlike the sorts of examples reported by Capdevila and Callaghan, here Polish workers' employment practices are not set out in an unreservedly positive fashion.

One potential explanation for this may lie in the fact that Pakistanis are not the only comparison group relevant to a discussion of Polish immigrants and their work practices. To understand the effect of this, in the next extract we turn to a description of the hard-working nature of Polish people in which a comparison is drawn between Polish immigrants and UK nationals. In Extract 2 the speaker, John, is responding to a question about whether the UK has benefited as a consequence of Polish immigration. He begins by describing the possible benefits of Polish immigration, before turning to its more negative consequences.

#### Extract 2

- 1 John It has benefited in (.) certain ways 'cos they have like they do hard  
2 work in the low paying jobs an' obviously that (0.5) that's a benefit

3 but >then at the same time< because they've taken those low paid jobs  
4 (.) some of the ↑British people that have a >bad attitude towards< work  
5 that (.) may have done those jobs now just (.) settle for being  
6 unemployed and benefits 'cos (.) they've got this attitude that they're  
7 victims because of the Polish people so they've (got) driven all the  
8 British people just to (.) feel victimised and >just to be happy< with  
9 being unemployed rather than before they might have made an effort  
(3.0) so that's the downside

In Extract 2, we see John arguing that while Polish immigration has brought some benefits to the UK, it also has a 'downside'. The 'downside' to which he refers is however made out, not in terms of the attributes or actions of the immigrant group, as is commonly found in arguments that are based on economic inactivity and lack of contribution, but instead on the attribution of particular characteristics to the host group 'British people'. Given that John himself might readily be ascribed membership of that group, this argument involves potential personal investment in the claims being made.

What we see, therefore, is John's sensitivity to this issue in the ways in which he develops his argument. Initially, he takes up the topic introduced by the question of the possible benefits to the UK of Polish immigration in agreeing that Polish immigration is 'a benefit'. Moreover, this agreement is set within an explanatory framework, in that benefit accrues because Polish immigrants 'do hard work in the low paying jobs'. However, he marks out this agreement as qualified through the use of 'in (.) certain ways', signalling his subsequent characterisation of Polish work practices as 'obviously that (0.5) that's a benefit' is not to be heard as a complete evaluation of the consequences of Polish immigration.

The subsequent 'but >then at the same time' thereafter marks a disjunction between what he has described and what is to follow. The remainder of his description is formulated in terms of a causal argument that sets out the consequences for 'British people' of what he has described this far: British people 'settle for being unemployed' because Polish immigrants have 'taken low paid jobs'. John develops at lines 3 to 7 his description of this causal relationship between Polish immigrants' employment in low paid jobs and the economic consequence of unemployment among British workers. This rests on the apparent lack of motivation on the part of some British people who have 'a >bad attitude towards< work' and who will now 'just (.) settle for being unemployed and benefits'. In repeating this argument at lines 6 to 7, John makes the causal connection explicit in stating that those he has been describing have 'got this attitude that they're victims because of the Polish people'.

The remainder of John's description at lines 7 to 9 upgrades his preceding argument, while also giving rhetorical emphasis to the claim that he has set out. His use of the extreme case formulation that the Polish people have 'driven all the British people just to (.) feel victimised and >just to be happy< with being unemployed' is not designed to be heard as literally correct (Edwards, 2000) but rather to lend rhetorical weight to his preceding argument about the negative consequences for British people of Polish immigration. It is this state of affairs that is encapsulated in John's upshot 'so that's the downside'. As Bolden (2008) has pointed out, statements of this form that are initiated with 'so' often perform the function of stating what is to be heard as an inferential outcome of preceding talk. The employed status of Polish immigrants, although to a limited extent presented as a benefit, thus become criticisable in terms of consequences for British people. Thus, in this particular form of economic argument, the negative outcome for Polish people, that they should be denied access to the UK employment market, is established because they are described as too

hard-working and relies upon explicit claims for the consequences of this economic activity for members of the host society.

In Extracts 1 and 2, then, we see similar claims being made about Polish workers regarding their industriousness and willingness to work for low pay. However, even though the argumentative outcomes in these contexts are somewhat different, in each case we see the work-related efforts of Polish people in the UK being constructed as less than fully welcome. In the next extract, we see a group of speakers co-construct a version of Polish workers in which their employment activities are presented not just as problematic for UK nationals but as intrinsically blameworthy. Extract 3 occurs at the very start of a discussion that follows on from an initial question asking participants what they think of Polish immigration into the UK.

## Extract 3

- 1 Ted em (1.0) just like (.) seen a couple programs on them (.) they're  
 2 stealing our ↑jobs  
 3 Vicki (DL) Like on TV?  
 4 Ted Yeah  
 5 Vicki (DL) OK  
 6 Ted But eh (w's) it wasn't like on channel four it was like proper channel  
 7 one so=  
 8 =[Laughter)  
 9 Jenny [look out= ((joking voice))  
 10 Ted =I'm easily [seen there ((joking voice))  
 11 [(Laughter)=  
 12 Jenny =got more (↑tickets?) ((joking voice))

- 13 Jim This is true
- 14 Ted Aye >I know I know< ehh
- 15 Jim ( )
- 16 Ted If they're if they're bringing something new (.) 'n like they're offering
- 17 spe- like something new but like (.) that helps us but if they're just
- 18 coming in (.) and like putting British people >out of work< which they
- 19 are 'cos they're more skilled and (.) they work for ↓less (.) then °I don't
- 20 agree with it°

At lines 1 to 2 of this extract, we see the same sort of claim that was advanced in Extract 2, that because Polish workers are too economically active, British people are economically inactive. One immediately noteworthy feature of Extract 4 is the 'them' and 'us' form of the talk adopted by Ted. Ted's initial turn, at lines 1 to 2, makes a strong claim in respect of those belonging to the group identified via 'them', in that they are engaged in hearably immoral activities in 'stealing' what belongs to Ted and others, namely 'our ↑jobs'. In presenting his initial claim, Ted offers up this description along with a warrant for the claim being made. It is presented as something that Ted has discovered from an independent source, in that he has 'seen a couple programs on them'.

Ted's claim here, however, differs from John's claim in Extract 2 in two key respects. First, as is commonly found in studies of prejudiced talk, it relies solely on the attribution of criticisable characteristics to the immigrant group: there is no reference to consequences for members of the host society that we saw produced by John. Second, in presenting his claim in extreme and unqualified terms, Ted does not demonstrate the sensitivity to the claims being made that we saw in John's response in Extract 2 despite his stated personal alignment with the claim ('our ↑jobs'). And the consequential relevance of these two key differences is seen

in the interaction that ensues. The turns that follow Ted's initial claim indicate that his construction of Polish workers as being engaged in immoral activities is not readily accepted by other members of the group. At lines 3 to 5, Ted's claim is met with by minimal responses from Vicki which orient towards the warrant being set out rather than to the claim about illegality in itself. In continuing, Ted takes up the topic on which Vicki has focussed and offers further detail on the nature of the warrant at hand. In so doing, he establishes that the television program to which he referred can be understood as relatively reliable, in that it did not derive 'on channel four' but instead appeared on 'proper channel one'. This additional detail accomplishes two outcomes. First, the program which is drawn upon as evidence for Ted's claim is established as in some respect more reliable than other sources. Second, this claim itself is set out in a humorous manner, as evidenced in line 8 where other members of the group respond by laughing. At lines 9 to 12, this humorous tone is continued with Jenny and Ted inserting comments which are presented in joking terms. All of this leads up to a claim from Jim that 'This is true' at line 13 which is taken up by Ted in the following line.

Taken as a whole, lines 8 to 14 instantiate a form of talk that elsewhere (McKinlay & McVittie, 2006) has been described as 'collusive laughter'. McKinlay and McVittie suggest that when a claim is made that may potentially lead to dispute, this is sometimes dealt with by interactants through joint laughter following on from the production of a humorous comment inserted by the original speaker. This establishes a topical 'slot' in the conversation that allows the original speaker to provide a reformulation of the claim that might otherwise have led to dispute within the local context. Here, we note that Ted's original claim, that immigrants steal jobs, is met with minimal responses from Vicki that suggest less than total agreement with the claim on offer. However, Ted's humorous account of the veracity of his warrant produces an episode of laughter from unspecified members of the group and is subsequently taken up by Jenny in her later turns. This offers up interactional 'slots' for Jim

at line 13 and Ted at line 14 to return to the original topic at hand: the illegitimacy of immigrant's employment activities, and paves the way for Ted's reformulation of that claim at lines 16 to 20.

Ted at lines 16 to 20 returns to the earlier topic of Polish immigration. His turn here, however, presents his argument against the presence of Polish workers in rather more qualified terms that were seen in his initial claim at lines 1 to 2. Here he provides a conditional formulation that sets out a candidate possibility for activities of Polish immigrants that would be positively evaluated. At lines 16 to 17, Ted refers to the possibility of Polish immigrants 'bringing something new (.). He continues by reformulating this possibility in stating 'n like they're offering spe-' but this reformulation is truncated by a self-initiated repair (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977), following which Ted repeats his first claim that Polish immigrants should bring 'something new'. This marks out a very specific way in which the activities of Polish immigrants could be positively evaluated, in that they would thereby contribute in a way that 'helps us'. Had Ted's claim been that Polish immigrants must offer something special, then there are a variety of ways in which such a special contribution could be made out in terms of current occupational practices within the UK. Indeed, Ted's own later description of Polish workers as 'more skilled' might be taken to instantiate such a case. On the other hand, the claim that Polish immigrants must offer something 'new' sets out a different requirement. Ted argues at lines 17 to 18 that Polish immigrants do not fulfil this requirement in that 'they're just coming in (.) and like putting British people >out of work< '. The claim that Polish immigrants must offer something new and that they fail to do so indicates that these immigrants are not to be treated as appropriately entitled to engage in any currently ongoing working practices within the UK. This neatly encapsulates the restrictive nature of acceptable forms of immigration: immigrants can only be viewed as legitimate contributors to the UK economy provided that

they do not take up any form of employment that currently exists within that country. Here, then, we see the way in which Ted unpacks his earlier claim about immigrants stealing ‘our’ jobs. Legitimate immigration involves creating new forms of employment, not taking up existing occupational opportunities. So those immigrants who are ‘just coming in’ are therefore to be viewed as blameworthy.

As he continues, he offers a warrant for the conclusion that he has reached. This comes at line 19, where Ted attributes to Polish immigrants two specific features, namely that ‘they’re more skilled and (.) they work for ↓less’. Such attributions can often be positively or relatively positively evaluated in depicting meritorious qualities of those being described. Here, by contrast, the descriptions of these particular features provide the warrant for a highly negative evaluation of Polish immigrants that picks out the consequences of them having such attributes and the impact on others, here ‘British people’. If it is illegitimate for immigrants to usurp current employment opportunities within the UK, then the more highly skilled and lower-paid the immigrant, the more illegitimate is his or her immigration, since the higher the ‘risk’ that that person will usurp existing UK employment opportunities. It is this argument and warrant that allows Ted at lines 19 to 20 to provide an upshot to his negative evaluation of the consequences of Polish immigration in stating that ‘‘I don’t agree with it’’.

This far we have seen how constructions of Polish people as hard-working can be used as a means of criticising others, as in Extract 1, or as grounds for criticising Polish workers themselves, as in Extracts 2 and 3. What these extracts have in common is that these descriptions of Polish workers and their work-related attributes form a central element of the argument being advanced in each case. And, in each extract, the economic activity of Polish workers is presented in less than fully positive terms, even when they do not comprise the group that is the target of prejudice. As we see in Extracts 2 and 3 however, the expression of

prejudice against Polish people is no straightforward matter. Criticism of Polish workers relies, not just on the attribution to them of engaging in economic activity, but also on the claimed consequences of such activity for UK nationals. And, this is seen to be a highly sensitive topic, one that requires speakers to do rather more discursive work than is found elsewhere in talk that criticises immigrant groups for economic inactivity instead of economic activity.

### **Economic in/activity and category pairs**

In the first section, issues of economic activity and inactivity were seen to be jointly deployed in the production of a causal narrative in which the economic activity of one group is subtly intertwined with the economic inactivity of another group. However, this sort of causal framing in only one means through which prejudice towards immigrants can proceed. In this section, we examine cases where talk of economic activity is related to exclusionary outcomes for immigrants, and yet the explicit development of a causal narrative is absent.

The following extract follows on from a question raised by the discussion leader about whether British workers should have priority in employment opportunities over Polish workers.

#### Extract 4

- 1 Kirk You see speaking from a person- speaking from a personal experience  
 2 (.) I've found that em (.) I've had (.) just recently we had one  
 3 >member of staff< who was ↑born and ↑bred in Britain Britain and  
 4 they were completely unreliable they didn't want to work they were  
 5 so::o lazy jes couldn't care ↑less and we've just recently hired someone  
 6 who (.) came to Britain when she was about (.) thirteen (.) twelve (1.0)

7 and (.) she has >very good< education she's at university and she  
 8 works >part time< and she works all the hours that she can get because  
 9 she wants ↓money and she works she does work ↑hard and she's  
 10 always eager to learn something ↑new (.) and do something and I've  
 11 Kenny [found  
 12 [but (.) what you were  
 13 prior talking about was talking about like people on the benefits system  
 14 (.) would it not be ↑better to get someone out workin' (.) rather than  
 just claiming loads of benefits?

In Extract 4 what we find is the same sort of discriminatory outcome for Polish people as we found in Extracts 2 and 3: it is better for British people to be in employment than Polish people. However, unlike those earlier extracts, in Extract 4 no causal explanation is set out. The extract begins with Kirk developing a claim for the industriousness of Polish workers as compared with the relative insufficiency of UK workers. One feature of Extract 4 is the sensitivity with which Kirk produces his claims for the relative capacities of UK workers and Polish workers. Rather than framing his descriptions in terms of the features of these groups in general, he produces a particularized account of two individuals. Furthermore, he orients to what he is saying as potentially problematic, in that he works up his entitlement to speak of those individuals. First, he appeals at line 1 to his 'personal experience' and goes on, at lines 2 and 10, to indicate that these descriptions are what he has 'found', suggesting that his descriptions are based on evidence that has been discovered rather than being based on subjective and potentially motivated grounds. Moreover, his descriptions are set out in terms of his own prior actions, having 'had one >member of staff<', and having 'just recently hired someone'. These action descriptions set out a

particular relationship, that of employer and employee, that indicates Kirk's relative entitlement to provide descriptions focusing on their work-related practices and motivations and attitudes towards work. All of these features mark out Kirk's description as orienting to potential challenge to the claims that he is making.

The remainder of Kirk's turn comprises descriptions of the relative merits of the two specific individuals: 'one >member of staff< who was ↑born and ↑bred in Britain' (lines 8 to 9) and 'someone who (.) came to Britain when she was about (.) thirteen (.) twelve' (lines 11 to 12). In providing a description of the first person, Kirk presents a view of that individual as relatively lacking in desirable work-related features. Here, the negative quality of the features attributed to this person is emphasised through a listing structure (Jefferson, 1990) each of whose items can be heard as negative, with this negative evaluation being given further emphasis through Kirk's use of the idiomatic phrase that 'they jes couldn't care ↑less'. This evaluation is rhetorically strengthened through Kirk's use of the extreme case formulation 'completely unreliable'. On the one hand, as Pomerantz (1986) has pointed out, formulations of this sort can be used in order to counter potential challenges to the legitimacy of complaints. On the other, as Edwards (2000) notes, extreme case formulations reflect a demonstrable participants' orientation to a description as one involving 'speaker investment'. In describing the second individual, Kirk makes reference to the length of time that the person has spent in Britain, her education, and her working activities. Furthermore, the work-related characteristics that he attributes to this second person are all positively evaluated, emphasised through a listing structure that stresses the all-encompassing nature of her positive attributes, in that she 'works all the hours that she can get', and is 'always eager to learn something ↑new'. Taken together, these features function to maximize the contrast between the two individuals, highlighting the virtuous qualities of the person 'who came to Britain' relative to those of the person who was '↑born and ↑bred in Britain'.

One feature of stories such as that seen here in Kirk's turn at lines 1 to 10 is that they are 'sequentially implicative' (Jefferson, 1978, p.228), that is that they project particular consequences for what is to follow in the interaction. Here, Kirk's descriptions of the relative merits of the Polish girl and those of the British girl projects an upshot that will favour the employment of the Polish girl instead of the British girl. Before Kirk can develop such an upshot, however, Kenny's overlapping talk through the interjection of 'but' at line 11 signals that what he is about to say will take the form of a departure from the argument that Kirk has been developing up to that point. Instead of continuing discussion of the relative merits of the two individuals, and any conclusion that might be drawn from Kirk's story, Kenny proceeds by introducing the category of 'people on the benefits system'. Thereafter he proposes a specific action in respect of this category, that they should be 'out workin'', and produces an evaluation of such an outcome in suggesting that it would be 'better' than their current status in 'just claiming loads of benefits'.

One especially noteworthy feature of the category that Kenny has introduced, and his proposed outcome for members of this category, is its relevance for the individuals who Kirk described in his preceding turn. In delineating the category as 'people on the benefits system', Kenny includes within this category potentially those such as the 'member of staff< who was ↑born and ↑bred in Britain' earlier described by Kirk as an employee that he 'had' and who no longer works for him. Simultaneously, however, the category excludes all those who Kenny currently employs, including the girl 'who (.) came to Britain when she was about (.) thirteen (.) twelve' and who Kirk described as being someone who 'does work ↑hard and she's always eager to learn something ↑new'. Thus, we see that Kenny, through his interjection, introduces this specific category not only to prevent Kirk from providing an upshot to his description of the two workers but also to invert the anticipated form of that upshot: instead of resulting in a claim that workers such as the girl who came to Britain and

who works hard should be employed, it is those such as the girl who was born and bred in Britain who should receive priority in terms of employment.

Similarly to Extract 4, the next extract is taken from a point in the group discussion following a question as to whether British workers should receive priority over Polish people in terms of employment. Again, the first speaker develops an argument based on her personal experience of working alongside a Polish girl.

Extract 5

- 1 Emma the girl that worked at my work she took eh English lessons she took  
2 English people for Polish [lessons  
3 Kirsty [really tried  
4 Emma she took dance lessons within the community (.) she really tried to take  
5 her culture to us >as well fit in with us< and that made a huge  
6 difference it made us feel like she (.) was making an effort to fit in and  
7 she was such a hard worker it made us look bad (.) she really worked  
8 hard [for her money  
9 Dave [but (.)  
10 tons of folk are out of work and just can't get a job

Similarly to Extract 4, this extract begins with a description of the qualities of a specific Polish worker that are grounded in the personal experience of the speaker. Thus, we see Emma introduce the topic of 'the girl that worked at my work' and continue by attributing various qualities to this individual. Unlike the previous extract, however, the qualities to which she initially refers while including work-related qualities are of a broader nature in that they include also descriptions of how that individual made efforts to belong to and to

contribute more broadly to the local community. At lines 1 and 2, Emma portrays 'the girl' as taking steps to belong to UK culture by way of taking 'English lessons' while also seeking to make local people familiar with her culture in giving them 'Polish lessons'. Following the collaborative agreement of the extent of such efforts from Kirsty at line 3, Emma continues with further description of the efforts of the individual under discussion in stating that 'she took dance lessons within the community'. She follows with an extended upshot at lines 5 to 6 of how these efforts are to be understood and evaluated, emphasising them through the references to 'really tried' and 'huge difference'. This is combined with a statement of the impact of the Polish worker's efforts on her fellow workers in that 'it made us feel like she (.) was making an effort to fit in'. Thereafter Emma turns to the work-related attributes of the Polish worker, again referring both to these and to their consequences for other workers in describing the Polish girl as 'such a hard worker it made us look bad'. This again is followed by a positive evaluation of the individual who is described as someone 'really worked hard [for her money]'.

As with Kirk's description in Extract 4, Emma's description here projects particular consequences for what is to follow. And, as there, Emma's description projects an upshot that will favour the employment of individuals such as the Polish girl to whom she has attributed this range of qualities over other workers. But, again similarly to Extract 4, Emma's turn is interrupted before she can reach this upshot. Dave's interjection at lines 9 to 10 prevents Emma from offering such a conclusion. Here, Dave's reference to 'tons of folk are out of work and just can't get a job' makes no reference to the work-related or other qualities of the Polish girl. The category that he introduces, however, in referring to 'folk [who] are out of work', just as does Kenny's introduction in Extract 4 of 'people on the benefits system', excludes people such as the Polish girl described by Emma while arguing that others should receive priority in terms of employment. Here, through the use of 'tons' Dave emphasises the

size of the group to which he is referring. Thus, regardless of the qualities attributed to the girl described by Emma, we again see the potential upshot of the exchange being inverted: rather than Polish workers being valued on the grounds of their efforts and qualities, it is others who should receive priority in employment.

In Extracts 4 and 5, we note the introduction of specific forms of category talk in which projected upshots are forestalled while, at the same time, groups of people are made relevant which are such that they could not include the Polish workers whose contributions were evaluated positively. We saw in those extracts how, in arguing for outcomes that prioritise UK people over Polish workers, speakers introduce categories that exclude (Polish) individuals who have been described in the preceding turn. However, as the following extract demonstrates, this form of exclusionary categorization does not rely upon prior talk. In some contexts, speakers may accomplish the very same outcome by managing this process within a single turn. Extract 6 follows a discussion as to the potential benefits or disadvantages of Polish workers being employed in the UK.

Extract 6

- 1 Al Young ones want to get the shop jobs but (.) eh (.) if you're 16 in a  
 2 shop you have to be supervised by an over 18 year old so (.) they just  
 3 get a Polish person and pay them less (.) and they're over 18 so they  
 4 don't have to be supervised  
 5 Steve mm hmm  
 6 Al there's no jobs for young people

At the beginning of Extract 6, Al introduces the category of 'young ones'. He describes this group in terms of their employment aspirations in wanting to get 'shop jobs'. However, he immediately introduces the disjunctive marker 'but' and follows this by making

relevant a particular category pair: people who are '16' and people who are 'over 18'. In so doing, he picks out a particular non-transitive property of this category pair: people who are 16 'have to be supervised' by people who are 'over 18', whereas, by inference, people who are 'over 18' do not have to be supervised by people who are 16. He sets out the negative consequence for the employment aspirations of people who are 16 by indicating that those responsible for hiring shop staff will hire people who 'are over 18 so they don't have to be supervised'.

We can note that, as he sets out this consequence, Al works up the membership of the second part of the category pair that he has introduced, namely 'the over 18 year old'. His reference to a generic 'Polish person' who is described as being 'over 18' assigns membership of this category to all Polish workers. The result of this contrast between the employment consequences of belonging to each category is then made out in terms of the actions of an employer who will prefer to employ a 'Polish person' who meets the criterion of being 'over 18' on the grounds that they can 'pay them less'. Following the collaborative agreement of Steve, this leads to Al's upshot at line 6 that 'there's no jobs for young people'. Age thus becomes the explanation as to why the employment aspirations of the category that Al has introduced are not met: a category that in the terms set out cannot include Polish workers or refer to their employment aspirations.

What we see then in Extracts 4 to 6 is speakers arguing for discriminatory outcomes for Polish workers without recourse to claims about their economic activity and its consequences for UK nationals as seen earlier. Instead, these arguments rely on the deployment of categories that are designed to exclude Polish workers, either through the introduction of a category in response to the immediately prior turn in the discussion or by developing a category pair that excludes Polish workers from the category that should receive

employment priority. We discuss the use and effects of such categories in further detail below.

### Discussion

The question then is what these findings can tell us about how British people construct the employment-related actions of one minority group, Polish workers, and about the negotiation of prejudice. Numerous previous studies have shown that speakers commonly orient to issues of prejudice by expressing negative views of immigrant groups while presenting these as justified and reasonable. In the specific case of arguments that are grounded in the economic inactivity of the immigrant group, criticism usually is made out in terms of a failure to engage in employment and to contribute appropriately to the host society. This is the type of argument that we see above in Extract 1, where speakers construct a hierarchy of prejudice based on engaging in employment. Thus, in contrast to another immigrant group, namely Pakistanis, the economic activity of Polish people receives muted acceptance.

The form of argument, however, changes markedly in Extracts 2 and 3 where the comparative context is one involving Polish workers and UK nationals. In these cases, where the economic activity of Polish workers is claimed to have negative consequences for UK nationals, the participants do not treat it as sufficient for a speaker simply to express negative views towards the immigrant group: Ted's initial claim in Extract 3 made out in this way does not meet with ready acceptance from others co-present. Instead of (merely) expressing negative views towards the immigrant group, therefore, speakers make explicit how the attributes being described have consequences for UK nationals. And as we see, given the speakers' possible investment in the descriptions on offer, such descriptions are presented carefully so as to render them less open to challenge than would be any direct negative

attributions to immigrant groups based on their economic activity (cf. Sambaraju et al., 2017). In these ways, arguments against immigrant groups that are based on economic activity rather than economic inactivity can be seen to differ from those commonly found in expressions of prejudice elsewhere: where economic activity is treated as the grounds for criticism, the role of the speaker and of the host society remain visible rather than being erased from view, and thus have to be sensitively managed to reduce the possibility of challenge.

However, in extracts 4 to 6, we see a different form of discriminatory talk: one in which the causal connections set out in extracts 1 to 3 are absent. Instead, we argue here, what these extracts display is a form of prejudice not identified in previous work. This expression of prejudice relies not on the attribution to the target group of particular characteristics or activities, but instead on how speakers introduce and mobilise categories to accomplish discriminatory outcomes. We noted above that in Extracts 4 and 5 the sequence of the interaction changed, and the upshot became inverted, following Kenny's introduction of a specific category of 'people on the benefits system' and Dave's introduction of 'folk (who) are out of work and just can't get a job' respectively. In Extract 6, Al introduces a category not immediately related to economic activity but, instead, to age and develops the category of 'young ones' in a way that does not include Polish workers.

Writing about how individuals deploy categories in everyday talk, Sacks (1992) notes that speakers can produce categories that pick out specific features of others, present or not, to present claims that are designed to attend to the possibility of challenge. Sacks (1992, p.60) presents the example taken from a group therapy meeting from which the only girl in the therapy group is absent. In that example, another member of the group is able to comment upon that absence by invoking the category of gender: 'it was nice having- having the opposite sex in- in the room'. As Sacks notes, the use of this category obviates the need for

the speaker to invoke any personal disposition towards the group member who is absent: 'he wasn't going to say that he likes her or anything like that'. By using the specific gender category, which in effect picks out one individual and allocates all other members of the group to a different (gender) category, the group member is able to deploy what Sacks terms a 'safe compliment', one that does not comment unfavourably on the other group members.

What we see here in Extracts 4 to 6 is an example of the same discursive process. As Sacks (1992) notes, the deployment of such categories works as a 'safe' means of delivering a compliment or accomplishing other interactional business where there are only two possible categories available, so that all who do not fall within one category necessarily fall within the other. Thus, in his example of gender, the only categories available are 'male' and 'female' with all members of the therapy group except the absent one being categorised as 'male'. This category pairing that allows the present ('male') member of the group to pay a 'safe compliment' to the absent member through use of the category 'female'. In the present analysis we see similar uses of category pairs in Extracts 4 to 6. The category that Kenny introduces in Extract 4, 'people on the benefits system', cannot include the worker that Kirk has described in favourable terms but does however allow for the inclusion of the worker previously employed and no longer working for Kirk. Moreover, this selected category 'people on the benefits system' functions also to exclude from membership all Polish workers who are by definition working. Thus, without any reference to Polish workers at all, Kenny's category can be seen as an example of what (following Sacks, 1992) we might usefully term 'safe prejudice': it functions to argue for discrimination against a target group (here Polish immigrants) but removes the necessity of attributing negative actions or qualities to them or indeed the necessity of referring to them at all. A similar effect is seen in Extract 5 where Dave argues for priority to be given to 'folk (who) are out of work', a category that cannot include the Polish girl described as a 'hard worker'. In Extract 6, Al's age-based category of

'young ones' initially forms part of a contrast with those who are 'over 18'. As his turn develops, however, he assigns all Polish people to the latter category, allowing him thereafter to argue for priority to be given to a category of 'young ones' that as set out cannot include any Polish workers. By providing speakers with a means of arguing against immigrant groups without the need to attribute any negative characteristics to that group, safe prejudice is less visible and more inoculated against challenge than other forms of prejudice. In particular, the bland introduction of categories as part of a context where only two categories are available allows speakers to mobilise exclusionary outcomes without relying upon the sorts of causal narratives seen in Extracts 1 to 3 and thereby forestalling potential underminings of such arguments.

What we see then from these findings is that the speakers develop exclusionary talk against Polish workers, orienting to their economic activity in the UK, in two highly contrasting ways. A first way is to attribute to Polish workers specific qualities of being hard-working and engaging in work that others do not take up. This attribution in itself, however, does not offer up a basis for exclusionary outcomes. Instead, speakers have to make explicit the consequences of such actions for members of the host society, a move that unlike other forms of argument makes immediately relevant the host society and the speaker. Such arguments therefore require sensitive development and management if they are to meet with acceptance from others. The second form of exclusionary talk, however, circumvents such difficulties. Through the use of categories that are designed to exclude all those except those for whom the speaker is arguing, speakers can avoid the attribution to immigrant groups of any employment-related features whatsoever. The outcome remains the same: one that excludes immigrant groups. It is however the absence of arguments based on economic activity and its consequences that renders this safe prejudice: it offers a way for speakers to

mobilise arguments that are less open to challenge than those found in other forms of prejudiced talk.

While we see safe prejudice being used here by our participants, such talk is by no means restricted to these instances. Indeed, prejudice in this form has in recent years become relatively common in political talk in the UK. In 2007, the then UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown used the since oft-quoted phrase ‘drawing on the talents of all to create British jobs for British workers’ (Brown, 2007) in arguing for that government’s achievements in creating jobs. This was a description that functioned to present a particular case for the employment of British workers while also functioning to downgrade the entitlements of workers from beyond the UK. More recently, in the political context following the UK vote for Brexit, we have seen the Home Secretary Amber Rudd arguing that ‘the test should ensure people coming here are filling gaps in the labour market, not taking jobs British people could do.’ (Rudd, 2016). In neither instance is it necessary for the speaker to argue against or to evaluate negatively the qualities of immigrants coming into the UK; instead the readily available categorisations of ‘British workers’ and ‘British people’ are used to achieve the same outcome, one that prioritises the entitlements of British people and which discriminates against those coming from elsewhere who might seek to engage in the UK labour market. Indeed, the reduced visibility of safe prejudice combined with its discursive force, provides politicians and others with a readily available form of argument that is less open to challenge than might be other talk involving non-UK nationals.

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