Leaders as ventriloquists. Leader identity and influencing the communicative
collection of the organisation.

Abstract

Traditionally leadership studies have focused on psychological and quantitative approaches
which have offered limited insights into the achievement of leader identity as an interactional
accomplishment. Taking a discursive approach to leadership in which leaders emerge as
those who have most influence in communicatively constructing the organisation, and using
transcripts of naturally-occurring decision-making talk, the purpose of this paper is to make
visible the seen but unnoticed discursive resources by which leader identity emerges in talk.
More specifically, using actor network theory (ANT) as a methodology, this paper focuses on
how the director of an organisation ventriloquizes (i.e. makes another actor speak through the
production of a given utterance) other entities to do leadership. Findings indicate that
leadership is achieved by making relevant to the interaction hybrid presences of actants that
allow certain organisational players to influence the communicative construction of
organisation and so manage the meaning of organisational reality. In this way, social actors
talk into being a “leader identity” which is not necessarily a purely human physical presence
but can also be a hybrid presence of human and non-human which is dislocated across time
and space. The hybrid production of presence(s) also allows leaders to enact authority as a
way of influencing others to accept their version of organisational reality.

Key words: Actor network theory, leader identity, ventriloquism, authority

Introduction

Leadership has traditionally been approached from a psychological perspective in which
language is perceived to be an asocial conduit for the transmission of meanings (Fairhurst and
Connaughton, 2014). However, as organisational research takes a linguistic turn (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000), this is increasingly being challenged, and leader identity and the organisation itself are increasingly being conceived of as discursive constructions. Discursive approaches to leadership can be summed up, according to Clifton (2012), as approaches to leadership that consider it to be a language game in which meaning is managed and in which leader identity emerges as the person who has, or persons who have, most influence in this process. From such a social constructionist perspective, organisational reality is communicatively constructed. Consequently, for a person to have the identity ‘leader’ - whether he/she is the person speaking, being spoken to, or being spoken about - is to be cast into the identity ‘leader’ which carries with it the associated characteristics of having the right and/or ability to influence the emergent meaning of the organisation.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to combine the insights of recent research into the discursive construction of leadership with the notion of ventriloquism (i.e., “the phenomenon by which an actor makes another actor speak through the production of a given utterance” [Cooren 2010a: 1]), and to explicate how through the process of ventriloquizing the person who emerges as the leader is able to influence the process of sense-making so as to gain compliance to his or her version of organisational reality. More specifically, this paper not only seeks to analyse the talk between individuals as isolated entities but, using actor network theory (ANT) as a methodology, it seeks to analyse how humans ventriloquize human/non-human and/or present/non-present entities such as ‘the organisation’, the ‘personnel’, ‘the budget’ to influence the process of organisational sense-making and so do leadership. Thus leader identity is conceived of not as a purely human affair, but as a hybrid production of presence(s) made relevant to the interaction through the act of ventriloquism.

**Leadership – literature review**
Whilst it is far beyond the scope of this paper to provide a complete review of the literature on leadership, a common theme that runs through it is a qualitative bias which is rooted in a psychological approach to leadership (Fairhurst, 2007). The criticism of such quantitative and psychologically skewed research is that it fails to catch the actual processes by which leadership is achieved as in situ practice and instead it provides abstractions that stand proxy for the actual doing of leadership (Conger, 1998: 118). Considering these shortcomings, it is not surprising that there have been calls for a more qualitative approach to leadership which can provide the tools necessary to make visible, and hence analysable, the actual doing of leadership (e.g., Alvesson, 1996; Knights and Willmott, 1992). Discursive leadership is one approach that seeks to redress this relative failure to engage with the actual process of doing leadership as an in situ accomplishment, and which aims to show how ‘leadership is brought off in some here-and-now moment of localized interaction’ (Fairhurst, 2007: 15). Leadership is achieved through talk-in-interaction because it is through talk that organisations find their entitative form and if organisations are communicatively constructed, then so is leadership (Tourish, 2014: 84). Consequently, the obvious place to study leadership is through the analysis of talk-in-interaction. Thus essential to such a discursive approach to leadership is the use of transcripts of naturally-occurring talk as a starting point of analysis and as a way of ensuring that the analysis is rooted in actual practice. Whilst only a few years ago, scholars interested in discursive leadership were able to claim that there was a dearth of research that used transcripts of naturally-occurring talk, over the past few years there has been a steady flow research that reflects the growing interest in discursive leadership as a viable complement to more traditional quantitative and psychologically-inspired research (see for example: Clifton, 2012 and 2014; Choi and Schnurr, 2014; Nielsen, 2009; Larsson and Lundholm, 2010; Schnurr and Chan, 2011; Schnurr and Zyats, 2012; Svennevig, 2012; Wodak, Kwon, and Clarke, 2011; Van De Mieroop and Schnurr, 2014).
More specifically, within the broad umbrella of discursive approaches to leadership, several researchers (e.g., Cooren and Fairhurst, 2003, Fairhurst and Cooren 2009, and Fairhurst, 2007) have already used analyses of talk-in-interaction to study the discursive construction of leadership as a hybrid of presence(s) enacted through ventriloquism. However, whilst they used selected sources from media reports and interviews as data, this paper uses naturally-occurring talk as data taken from a business meeting. Therefore, the novelty of this paper is that it shows how ventriloquism is used as a rhetorical strategy to influence the communicative construction of the organisation and how leadership is achieved, or contested, on a turn-by-turn basis.

**Method: ventriloquism and actor network theory**

Actor network theory (ANT) emerged from the work of Callon and Latour in the 1980s (see for example, Callon 1986, Latour 2005). One of its basic tenets is that in order to understand what is going on in interaction and how this is achieved, it is not enough to focus on human agency alone. This is because to do so would be to ignore other entities, such as machines, documents, written texts, ideas, principles, organisations and so on that constitute the world of the social actors. Therefore ANT supposes that social actors (or actants) are not necessarily human, rather they are entities that are collective, individual, human or non-human that can enter into network of associations with other, present or non-present, agents. Thus, as part of their everyday mundane interaction, human actants associate with other human/non-human and/or present/non-present actants which make networks of actants spreading across time and space relevant to the interaction. The classic illustration of this is the example of the speed bump taken from Latour (1999) and quoted in Fairhurst and Cooren (2009: 473). When a motorist sees a speed bump, he/she slows down and in this way a non-human actant affects the actions of humans. Taking an ANT approach, the fact that the bump slows down the
driver is only the beginning of the story; the network that the bump incarnates should also be taken into account (i.e., the legislation that authorized the speed bump to be built, the workers that built it, the principles of road safety that justified it, and so on). Thus it is not only present human actors who affect humans; a plethora of present/non-present and/or human/non-human actants, which are mobilized by human actants, also affect the social world.

As Fairhurst and Cooren (2009: 474) point out, the Montreal school have recently set about giving ANT theory an “interactional and organisational twist”.¹ Key to the Montreal School’s position is that researchers should not just consider humans interacting, rather they should analyse all of the actants (human/non-human and/or present/non-present) that are presentified or made present in an interaction. This is achieved through a process of ventriloquism which is:

understood metaphorically as the process by which interlocutors animate or make beings speak (which I propose to call figures, the word ventriloquists use to speak of the dummies they manipulate), beings that in turn animate these same interlocutors in interaction

(Cooren, 2010b: 35 [my translation])

Thus a mutual transformation occurs so that when actants are ventriloquized, they act together and fuse to produce a third actant (Latour, 1994: 32) and in this way a synergy is achieved that allows them to achieve goals which otherwise would be unattainable. This

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¹ The approach to organisational research given the name ‘The Montreal School’ was founded in the early 1970s by James R. Taylor. Its basic tenet is that organisations are communicatively constructed. Thus there is no pre-discursive organisation that is ‘out there somewhere’ and which corresponds to ‘an organisation’. Rather, organizations are abstract objects that are forever being recreated in the ongoing conversations of people (See, for example, Taylor and Van Every [2000]).
interactional approach to ANT, which places the emphasis on how networks are talked into being and the actions which these networks then accomplish, allows the researcher both to identify the networks that speakers animate in their conversations and to explicate how the speakers position themselves as being animated by the actants. This interactional approach to ANT therefore allows the researcher to make visible the seen but unnoticed discursive resources through which humans mobilise human and non-human actants and present and non-present actants which are transported across time and place to be made present in the interaction and which are employed ‘to do things’ (inter alia leadership). Further, ventriloquizing thus has a rhetorical dimension to it (Cooren, 2008 and 2010a). The persuasive nature of ventriloquism comes from the authority that the actants invoke, and which can be mobilised to become relevant to the here-and-now of the interaction. For example, Benoit-Barné and Cooren (2009) show how by the using an office memo and by speaking on behalf of the organisation, the director ventriloquizes the organisation, presentifies it, and so makes her talk more authoritative. It is through this that she is able both to account for her actions and to make her talk more persuasive by animating, and being animated by, an authoritative source (i.e., the organisation).

Moreover, it is through ventriloquizing that the organisation can be incarnated in talk and so the Montreal School considers organisation to be a hybrid and polymorphous entity that is composed of human and non-human elements that can be made present, and thus consequential, to the interaction. Communication from this perspective is not something that happens inside pre-discursive structures such as organisations, rather organisations are “ongoing and precarious accomplishments realized, experienced, and identified primarily - if not exclusively – in communication processes (Cooren et al., 2011: 1150). However, as noted before, this communicative construction of the organisation is not the accomplishment of
human actants alone, rather a variety of forms of agency (ideas, structures, principles etc.) are also in play and they are presentified and made consequential to the interaction through a process of ventriloquizing. What emerges as the organisation through such a communicative process is embodied through the talk of the organisational players who either claim to, or are regarded as being authorized to, speak in the organisation’s name. Consequently, organisations exist, *inter alia*, “though all these ventriloqual effects of representation/incarnation/materialization/reification” (Cooren, 2012: 6). And the leader emerges, or the leaders emerge, from this process of the communicative construction of the organisation as the person who has, or persons who have, most influence in this process and who, *inter alia*, speak on behalf of the organisation. Through animating, and being animated by ‘the organisation’, the emergent leader not only defines it but he/she is reflexively defined as the manager of its meaning (i.e. as leader). Moreover, the emergent leader also animates the organisation as a source of authority and so makes his/her version of the organisation more persuasive and so brings other organisational players on board and casts them as followers. Thus, leader identity is not only a human affair, but, to return to the metaphor of the ventriloquist, it is the comedian (leader) and the dummy (organisation) who are reflexively incumbent of leader identity, and as a hybrid leader identity they influence the process of communicatively constructing the organisation in a way that a human on his/her own could not.

**Data**

The data come from a series of monthly management meeting that were video-recorded in a language training centre, given the pseudonym Rijsel Langues, in the north of France. Rijsel Langues is one of the main players in the highly competitive world of corporate language training in the north of France. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss pedagogic issues
relating to the provision of corporate language training. Those present at the meetings were
Alice, the director of the centre, and Nigel, Beth, and Liz the senior language trainers.

The particular extract analysed here takes the form of a decision-making episode of talk in
which the senior teachers ask if there is the possibility of any permanent fulltime posts being
created so that they can deal with pedagogic issues such as training the new teachers and
designing training courses. At the time of the recording, the position of head of studies had
just been suppressed to save money and the senior teachers, paid on an hourly rate for any
pedagogic work they did, were finding it difficult to deal with the workload. Consequently,
there had been complaints that the senior teachers ‘did nothing’. In response to this, the
senior teachers are angling for fulltime ‘pedagogic’ positions and they ask the director of the
centre to clarify their roles which leads to the announcement of a decision that there will be
no change and that no fulltime pedagogic positions will be created because the company
cannot afford it. Decision-making episodes of talk are key sites for constructing the
organisation because, as Castor (2005: 481) points out, decision-making talk is not a simple
conduit for conveying information, rather as organisational players make their decisions, they
make sense of what is going on, or has been going on in the organisation and through gaining
compliance with projections of future action, they shape what the organisation will be. Thus
decision-making episodes of talk are prime sites for the communicative construction of
organisation. They are also a locus for the doing of leadership (Clifton, 2006 and 2012)
because the leader emerges through talk as the person who has most influence in this process
of constructing the organisation.

The data were transcribed using the Jeffersonian system (Jefferson, 2004). A list of symbols
used can be found in appendix one. For ease of reading, the transcript has been broken down
into several extracts. The original French transcript, on which the analysis is based, is not
provided here for reasons of length. The English translation is aimed at striking a balance between readability and a literal word for word translation.

**Analysis**

The transcript is broken down into seven extracts for ease of analysis. In the first extract, a decision is elicited which displays an orientation to Alice, the director of the centre, as leader. This is because she is asked to (1) make sense of the current situation (why is there criticism that the senior trainers ‘do nothing’) and (2) author a version of future organisational reality that solves this problem (i.e., make a decision). Moreover, after having given her decision, she accounts for it and it is through doing this account that she manages the meaning of the organisation and makes it persuasive so as to build consensus and to construct an agreed upon version of what the organisation is. Consequently, it is Alice who emerges as the person who has most influence in this process of communicatively constructing the organisation.

**Extract one. Requesting a decision and making leader/follower identities relevant to the interaction**

In the prior talk (not included here) the fact that the senior teachers have been criticised for ‘doing nothing’ had been raised. In line one, Alice asserts her rights as chairman to offer the opportunity for the other participants to raise any other business, which Liz does in the form of a request for a decision about the roles of the senior teachers.

1 Alice are there any questions anything else erm

2 (1.1)

3 Liz me I wanted to have a definition of our role [(gaze to B)] [a little clearer [(gaze to A)]
After a relatively long pause, Liz asks “me I wanted to have a definition of our role”. A problem is thus raised which entails a search for a solution/decision: what are the roles of the organisational players within the organisation? As Liz takes this turn, she ventriloquizes the other senior teachers thus making the entity ‘senior teachers’ relevant to the interaction. First, this is seen through the use of the pronoun ‘our’ (line 3: our role), which as she speaks is addressed to Beth via eye gaze. Beth responds to this with backchannels (nod and “yes yes”). In the continuation of the turn, Liz accounts for her question “to know really the difference so that everybody knows what we do”. At the end of the turn, she gazes at Alice, again marking her out the recipient of the turn.

However, before Alice can answer, Beth self-selects to take the floor and through the preface ‘yes’ and repetition of the content of the turn aligns with Liz’s prior turn. At the end of the turn, she shifts eye gaze to Alice and so addresses the turn to Alice. Liz and Beth thus co-construct the request for a definition of the role and they both orient to Alice as the person who should provide an answer. This orientation thus talks into being the identities leader (i.e., the person to whom others look to manage meaning) and reflexively follower (i.e., the people who surrender their opportunity to manage meaning). The identities leader/follower thus become relevant to the interaction, not as a researcher’s construct, but as made visible in the interaction through the participants’ own orientation to relevant identities-in-talk.
Extract two. Resistance to leadership

Leadership is not the property of any one person that can be brought willy-nilly to the interaction, rather it has to be enacted for another first time and when this happens it can be open to resistance as well as acquiescence. Leaders need followers, and if participants at the meeting do not align with Alice’s sense-making, then her leadership is in doubt. In the following exchange, Alice’s leadership is called into question by Nigel through a change of footing which disaligns with the identity work that has cast the senior teachers as followers and Alice as leader who has the right to define the organisation through decision-making.

10 Alice the remark that we do nothing you tell them to come and see me and euh ↑↓ to make the

11 remark to me

12 Nigel ((pretends to get up and leave, sits back down smiling))

13 Beth ((smile))

14 Alice ..... h ((smiles)) euh for the moment erm .hh heuh for the moment in any case this year

The request to provide a definition of “our roles” requires a conditionally relevant next action which thus maintains the relevance of the leader/follower identities. This is provided by Alice in the next turn (line 10: “the remark that we do nothing you tell them to come and see me and euh ↑↓ to make the remark to me”) who defines the role and responsibilities of the organisational players and so defines the organisation. Her role is to trouble shoot and deal with problems such as trainers who think that the senior trainers do nothing. However, as stated before, leadership is a co-construction, it is only achieved when a follower identity is made relevant to the interaction: there can be no leaders without followers. And whilst Liz and Beth have talked into being follower identities, Nigel uses irony to resist such identity work. In line 12, Nigel disaligns with Alice’s prior turn (i.e., he takes a turn that doesn’t facilitate the activity in progress [Stivers et al., 2011: 21]) and by making as if to get up and
fetch the trainers who said that the senior trainers do nothing and to tell them to see Alice, he changes from a serious footing to a humorous footing. This turn is marked as humorous through the smile. Nigel thus ironises Alice’s claim to leadership to which Beth, since she reciprocates with a smile, also aligns. In the following turn, Alice also aligns with this humorous interjection through her smile, but she also treats it as a side sequence (i.e. “a break in contrast to a termination; that is, the on-going activity will resume” [Jefferson, 1972: 294]) and skip-connects to her non-adjacent prior turn. This move re-topicalises her definition of the roles of the senior trainers, closes down Nigel’s ironic interjection, and reclaims the floor.

**Extract three. Announcing and accounting for a decision**

Having closed down Nigel’s disaligning actions, Alice take the floor to announce her decision and to account for this decision in a way that will gain the complicity of the senior teachers.

14 Alice ….. h ((smiles)) euh for the moment erm hh heuh for the moment in any case this year

15 considering the budget you know very well that some hours were given to you to do the

16 training of the new teachers \begin{align}
\text{begin} & \text{reflect on the evolution of the pedagogy erm}
\end{align}

17 but er and=advise= you advise the teachers\textup{↑} euh and erm little by little we’ll see but the

18 the number of hours is very restricted effectively we can’t ask you to build\textup{↑} I don’t know

19 what

20 Beth ((nod))

21 Liz that is my impression a little snowed under we have ideas er need to know your opinion euh

22 ((gaze to A)) \begin{align}
\text{we know that <} & \text{we are limited this year so er next year er [((gaze to A))]}
\end{align}

23 Beth [ ((nod)) yes ]
In lines 14 following, Alice provides the conditionally relevant response to the request to ‘define our roles’ and so she manages the meaning of the organisation and the roles of the organisational players within the company. Their role is thus the “training of the new teachers”, “begin to reflect on the evolution of the pedagogy” and to “advise the teachers”, but “we can’t ask you to build↑ I don’t know what”. Alice accounts for this in budgetary terms: (line 15), “considering the budget”. She thus ventriloquizes the budget and so animates, and is animated by, it. Through doing this, she fuses her identity and ‘the budget’ to create a hybrid presence Alice/budget which now becomes relevant to the interaction.

Through ventriloquizing the budget, not only does she shape organisational reality in terms of what Rijssel Langues can and cannot afford to do, but she also gives her words more weight because, coming from a legitimate source, they appear “reasonable, rational, intelligible, justifiable, [and] accountable (Cooren, 2010c: 29, my translation, italics in original). This is because it is not only Alice accounting for her decision not to have fulltime pedagogic posts, rather it is a third actant that is made up of Alice and the budget and through animating, and being animated by, the budget, Alice attributes authority to herself. This is because, as Brummans et al. (2013: 350) argue, authority as a process of influence:

\[\text{does not reside in people or things, but is an effect that needs to be accomplished, again and again, by calling upon different sources of authority and bringing them into play in the enactment of situations. Authority is thus a phenomenon of plural and hybridized effects of presence(s) and absence(s), as these sources need not be physically present in the same locale.} \]


Thus ventriloquizing non-human actants is one way of doing leadership by accounting for a particular version of organisational reality, and by authorizing this version of reality to make it more persuasive and so gain compliance. Moreover, access to knowing about the budget is
identity-bound to Alice’s hierarchical position as the director of Rijsel Langues. This is because she, as director, knows about the budget whereas the senior teachers do not have this knowledge. Thus Alice is able to mobilize more powerful resources than the others in her quest for influence. Consequently, through ventriloquizing the budget she is able not only to do leadership, but she simultaneously makes relevant her identity as director to do leadership.

Further, in line 17, Alice states: “little by little we’ll see but the the number of hours is very restricted effectively we can’t ask you to build↑ I don’t know what”. In the original French, Alice uses ‘on’ which is a particularly ambiguous pronoun: is it ‘we’ the group present in the meeting or the institutional ‘we’ in which the speaker aligns with the organisation? The first use of ‘on’ (translated as we) is ambiguous but the referent is disambiguated in the continuation of the turn, “we can’t ask you to build↑ I don’t know what”. Since there is a juxtaposition of ‘we’ and ‘you’ it is clear that the senior teachers (you) are not part of the ‘we’. The ‘we’ is thus an institutional ‘we’, so in this case Alice is claiming to speak on behalf of Rijsel Langues. Alice thus ventriloquizes the organisation, in a way that suits her, and so animates, and is animated by, it. In so doing she defines it as an organisation which can’t ask you to build whatever and through communicatively constructing the organisation, she manages its meaning and does leadership. Moreover, the hybrid actant Alice/Rijsel Langues is cast as the actant who ‘tells the others what to do’ and so leader and follower identities are made relevant, the leader being not only Alice but Alice combined with the Rijsel Langues. Leader identity is thus crafted not only in human terms, but also in terms of the non-human actants that they ventriloquize and ‘fuse’ with.

Moreover, Alice’s construction of what the company is through the decision not to create permanent posts, the account for it (budgetary reasons), and the definition of the role of the

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2 ‘On’ can variously be translated as ‘we’ or ‘one’, and is often used in informal French instead of ‘nous’ (Dubois and Lagane, 1993: 91).
senior teachers is accepted by Liz and Beth. Beth nods in agreement (lines 20 and 23), and Liz explicitly aligns with this management of meaning (line 21: “that is my impression”) and she also explicitly orients to Alice’s leader identity (line 21: “need to know your opinion”). So, whilst not claiming to be able to look into the minds of the participants, interactionally at least, Liz and Beth both align with Alice and display agreement with her management of meaning. By confirming her construction of the organisation as one that cannot afford fulltime pedagogic posts, they thus confirm her leader identity.

**Extract four: An assessment and request for a decision for the following year**

In the continuation of her turn, (line 22) Liz makes an assessment, “we are limited this year so er next year er”, and as she hesitates (er) she addresses her unfinished turn to Alice. Alice orients to this turn as a request to know whether or not there will be money for a fulltime position in the following year.

21 Liz that was my impression a little snowed under we have ideas er need to know your opinion euh

22 (gaze to A) [we know that <] we are limited this year so er next year er [(gaze to A)]

23 Beth [ ((nod)) yes]

24 Alice [we are limited this

25 year but I find that we have made great progress [in relation to what there was

26 Beth [ "yes yes (even so there is)"

27 Alice before we produced enormously we had all the open access which was develop[ed

28 Liz ][(nod)]

29 Alice we started to have a reflection on pedagogy in gen[eral

30 Liz ][(nod)]
In line 22, using the inclusive pronoun ‘we’, Liz claims that we know that we are limited for this year. The ‘we’ again is ambiguous: it could ventriloquize Rijssel Langues, or it could refer to those present in the meeting, or just the senior teachers. In this case, it remains ambiguous since it is not disambiguated by the participants. Regardless of who the ‘we’ actually ventriloquizes, Liz makes an assessment of the situation and thus a claim to manage the meaning of what is going on in the company. Yet, not only does Liz make an assessment but she does it in the name of either the organisation, the senior teachers, or the senior teachers and Alice the director. By leaving the ambiguity open the authoritative source of her assessment is also left vague and so it suggests three different possible sources of authority that are simultaneously made present and thus makes her assessment more persuasive (cf. Benoit-Barné and Cooren, 2009: 22). As Clifton (2012) points out assessments provide a major resource constructing organisational reality and thus for the management of meaning. Simply put: making a first assessment is a claim to epistemic authority and the right to assess what the organisation is or isn’t (Raymond and Heritage, 2006). However, talk does not take place in an asocial vacuum and claims to epistemic primacy have to be confirmed or disconfirmed in a next turn (Pomerantz, 1984). In this case, in the next turn, Alice agrees with this assessment (line 24: “we are limited this year”), but then in the continuation of her turn she adds that despite this (line 25) “in relation to what there was before we produced enormously we had all the open access which was developed we started to have a reflection
of pedagogy in general”. The ‘we’ here still remains ambiguous: it could ventriloquize either the management team of senior teachers plus Alice, or the organisation. The use of ‘we’ is not disambiguated by further talk and so remains ambiguous, but regardless of who or what it ventriloquizes, at the end of this aligning move Alice takes epistemic authority away from Liz because she states ‘it’s true it’s limited”. This explicit agreement displays that her opinion was held prior to Liz’s assessment and therefore is not subject to the loss of epistemic primacy inherent in a second position (Sneijder & te Molder, 2006). In this way Alice retains her claim to epistemic primacy and thus rights to manage meaning and so do leadership. The ventriloqual effects also remain ambiguous since the referent of the ‘we’ is not disambiguated and so the source of authority for these assessment remains vague. However, despite this, through their nods and minimal backchannels (yes), Beth and Liz align with Alice’s assessment and so confirm her leadership role.

**Extract five: Announcing and accounting for the decision**

In the continuation of her turn, Alice, orients to Liz’s prior turn as being a suggestion to make fulltime pedagogic positions available for the senior teachers in the following year. She gives her decision not to do this and she accounts for it.

32 Alice  euh it’s true it’s limited we always want to do more in any case it will never be full-time administrative senior teacher positions in any case it will be some hours of (. ) of work like that euh Rijsel Langues can’t= is not a structure that can support people er sala[ried euh who don’t teach it’s for that  [ ( )

34 Beth [((nod))

35 Liz [yes I know but ( )
In line 32, Alice announces a decision: “in any case it will never be full-time administrative senior teacher positions in any case it will be some hours of (.) of work like that euh Rijssel Langues can’t= is not a structure that can support people er salaried euh who don’t teach it’s for that”. To account for her decision she thus ventriloquizes Rijssel Langues. Through animating it, and being animated by it, she makes present a third hybrid actant (i.e., Alice/Rijssel Langues). Through speaking in the name of the Rijssel Langues she is thus able to communicatively construct it as an organisation that cannot afford salaried senior teachers. Further she also gives a source of authority for this decision which is based on the legitimacy of her source (Rijssel langues) and this is rhetorically designed to gain agreement from the senior teachers (Cooren, 2008 and 2010a). She thus does leadership because (1) through ventriloquizing the organisation, she simultaneously manages the meaning of what it is and (2) she does so in such a way as to gain compliance through mobilizing an authoritative source. In line 34, Beth nods and so aligns with this leadership work. However, Liz starts a turn which projects disagreement: “yes I know but”. In the following turn (extract 6 below) Alice, in the face of potential disagreement, accounts for her decision.

**Extract six: Accounting for the decision in the face of potential disagreement**

36   Alice  but no we are=we suppressed the position of head of studies which was put under the post of

37   director all the responsibility is under the same hat (   ) and it’s for financial

38   reasons the centre cannot have er (.) a team er head of studies like perhaps

39   some other centres where I don’t know where Rijssel Languages can’t so it will never be that

40   it will always be some hours given to be able to do some pedagogic work

41   accompany some people and I see that more as the accompanying of of of

42   the teachers and generally the new teachers because the oldtimers it’s certain they ask
less for accompanying and its good it’s what we [desire\=want euh and a little

[(((nod))]

management\=look a little bit at the resources and bring ideas on management but putting

it in to practice that will certainly be done by me because we don’t have the [budget or well

[(((nod))]

maybe next year but that would [surprise me if we have it it will be two thousand and six

[(((nod))]

or [seven not before °it’s not there\=euh Rijssel Langues was\=is in a bad way [°so it’s\=s°]

[(((nod))]

In lines 36 following, Alice continues accounting for the decision. First, using an ambiguous ‘we’ form which could either ventriloquiz her hierarchic superior at the local chamber of commerce to which Rijssel Langues ultimately depends, or Rijssel Langues, she says we “but no we are\=we suppressed the position of head of studies which was put under the post of director all the responsibility is under the same hat”. Thus, the ‘we’ either ventriloquizises Rijssel Langues, or her link with the governing body, and so makes relevant a hybrid identity of either Alice/organisation or Alice/hierarchical superior which gives authority to her prior actions of suppressing the post of head of studies. This ambiguity is not resolved by the participants, yet it can also be seen as a persuasive since by leaving the ambiguity open it invokes two different possible sources of authority that are simultaneously made present (cf. Benoit-Barné and Cooren, 2009: 22). So, as before, Alice makes use of her hierarchical position that gives her access to those further up the organisational ladder to give her management of meaning authority through being able to ventriloquize more powerful actants than the senior teachers who do not have direct access to people further up the ‘chain of command’.
Alice then accounts for the suppression of the head of studies position because of financial reasons and, as before, by ventriloquizing ‘financial reasons’ and ‘the centre’ she creates a hybrid identity that lends authority and legitimacy to her account for the decision. She then continues her turn to reiterate the decision (line 39: “so it will never be that it will always be some hours given”) and to define the roles of the senior teachers in the company and so manage meaning and do leadership (line 40: “to do some pedagogic work accompany some people”). Further, through labelling this as “the accompanying of of the teachers”, she excludes other versions of the role of the senior teachers and through this process of naming and labelling she constructs a particular (i.e., her) version of what the organisation is. Further, in line 43, Alice states, “and it’s good it’s what we desire=want”. She uses the ambiguous ‘we’: is it the institutional ‘we’ or is it those present in the meeting? Since this ambiguity is not resolved by the participants, it allows two possible interpretations. If it ventriloquizes Rijsel Langues, it and makes relevant the hybrid Rijsel Langues/Alice actant and so as already explained gives authority to her talk and communicatively constructs Rijsel Langues. Alternatively, if she ventriloquizes the management team (i.e., Alice plus senior teachers) she projects agreement and makes what the senior teachers want tangible to the interaction. Therefore, not only does she have influence in communicatively constructing the organisation, but she also communicatively constructs what the senior teachers want within that organisation and she projects this ‘want’ onto them. In so doing, she recruits their ‘wants’ to support her particular version of organisational reality and so, unless disaligned with in following turns, projects agreement onto them.

In the continuation of the turn, Alice again sets out the roles of the senior teachers: “a little management=look a little bit at the resources and bring ideas on management”, and her own role which is “putting it in to practice that will certainly be done by me”. She thus again defines organisational reality and the roles of the organisational players within it. And once
more, she accounts for this by invoking the legitimacy of her decision through ventriloquizing the budget (“we don’t have the budget”) and the organisation (“Rijsel Langues was=is in a bad way”) which as before mobilises the legitimate source of her decision-making and makes her sense-making more persuasive and authoritative. This defining of organisational reality is confirmed as it is delivered via the nods which display preliminary agreement and project an affiliative stance (Stivers, 2008).

Extract seven. Dealing with projected dissent

In the continuing talk, Liz overlaps and orients to Alice’s turn as criticism which entails the doing of reassurance to bring Liz back on board.

52 Liz [but no we

53 try to do our best [with the little

54 Alice [yes exactly

55 Beth ( )

56 Alice yes† yes exactly no but I think that it’s appreciated me I appreciate it a lot euh↑ euh I

57 think that colleagues appreciate it a lot above all the new [teachers the oldtimers in any

58 Liz [ ((nod))

59 case they don’t like that we (move) their habits either so they they have=there is a

60 reaction that is fairly difficult but it’s not necessarily viz-a-viz you but viz-a-viz

61 me too try to move their habits and behaviour ( ) try to boost a little bit everybody

62 we need to change good that comes from me it doesn’t come from (“you”) I think

63 that you the work that you do is appreciated the new teachers appreciate it [euh "there is no

64 Liz [( ((nod))

21
problem but know that for the moment it costs

and to improve communication

In line 52, Liz orients to the prior turn as an assessment that does criticism: “but we try to do our best with the little”. Alice overlaps this turn as it is progress, with an explicit agreement token (line 54: “yes exactly”) which claims epistemic primacy because she claims that she had this knowledge prior to Liz taking her turn (Sneijder and te Molder, 2006), and Alice takes the floor to author a turn which defuses what Liz has oriented to as criticism. What is significant here, is that rather than ventriloquizing other presences, Alice uses the pronoun “I”. In line 56, she states: “yes exactly no but I think that it’s appreciated me I appreciate it a lot”. This personal pronoun use thus stresses her personal affiliation with Liz’s stance and, as Stivers et al. (2011: 21) point out, affiliation is “maximally pro-social”. This is because it matches the prior speaker’s evaluative stance and displays empathy with them. Through doing this ‘personal touch’ and avoiding any hybridity, Alice shows sympathy with Liz and uses it as a persuasive strategy to gain her compliance and to convince her that her work is appreciated and that there is no problem. Thus, at times, it is strategic not to ventriloquize and to use “I” as a way of displaying uniquely human agency which indexes empathy which, in this case through alignment of personal stance, is more persuasive.

In the continuation of her turn, Alice then ventriloquizes the non-present colleagues which builds consensus for her assessment of organisational reality. Through animating, and being animated by, the collectivity ‘colleagues’, she talks herself into being as somebody who has the right to know what the personnel of the company think and, as Smith (1978) points out, building consensus is a rhetorical strategy that authorises the facticity of an account. This is because if the particular version of organisational reality that is being put forward is held
independently by other people, then this makes it more believable and thus more persuasive. Further, through ventriloquizing ‘the colleagues’, Alice constructs the organisation as being split between ‘the new teachers’ and ‘the oldtimers’. The new ones appreciate the work of the senior teachers, the old hands “don’t like that we move their habits”. Thus again Alice claims to voice the opinion, thoughts and feelings of organisational players and through this she communicatively constructs a particular (i.e., her) version of organisational reality.

Alice then returns to the question that permeates this decision-making episode (i.e., what is the role of the senior teachers?) and she reaffirms that it is to “try to move their habits and behaviour ( ) try to boost a little bit everybody”. Using an institutional ‘we’, she then ventriloquizes the organisation (we need to change) and so, as before, authors a version of the organisation as being in need of change and simultaneously provides an authoritative source of this need for change (i.e., the organisation itself). She then makes explicit her role as the ventriloquist (“that comes from me”) who animates the organisation and so she claims leader identity as the person (in metaphorical terms) manipulating the dummy of the organisation. Moreover, she reinforces this leader identity by explicitly making follower identities relevant to the interaction because: “it doesn’t come from you” (line 63). She then ends her turn by stating that there is no problem, which justifies preserving the status quo of not having fulltime pedagogic positions because if there is no problem, there is no need to make new positions available. She then accounts for the decision one last time by ventriloquizing financial reasons (line 66:”it costs”). At this point Liz changes topic and the decision is oriented to as accepted as the constant backchanneling, often non-verbal, throughout the decision-making episodes of talk indicates.

**Observations and conclusions**
As various commentators (e.g., Larsson and Lundholm, 2010; Svennevig, 2012) have pointed out, leader is a professional identity that emerges through a process of having most influence in the process of communicatively constructing the organisation. The question remains: how is this influence achieved? This paper explicates that ventriloquizing is a strategy that leaders may employ to influence the management of meaning of the organisation and to persuade others to accept this version of organisational reality and to act on it. Hybridity is therefore an essential part of leader identity, and this paper explicates three ways that hybridity can be achieved as an amalgam of: human and non-human entities and present and non-present entities.

First, Alice ventriloquizes non-human actants, notably the budget and the organisation itself. Through doing this she is able to manage meaning and author a particular version (i.e., her version) of what the organisations is. It is, in this case, an organisation that cannot afford to have fulltime pedagogic positions. This is a persuasive rhetorical strategy because not only does she construct a version of the organisation, but Alice also constructs an authoritative version of the organisation which gains commitment. This is because through ventriloquizing legitimate sources Alice is not only the author of this particular version of organisational reality but her version carries with it the legitimate authority of the non-human entities which she incarnates (i.e. the budget and the organisation itself). Thus the influence that she wields does not reside in herself alone. It is an action that is accomplished through incarnating sources of authority and making them relevant to the interaction so as to gain consensus. The doing of authority through ventriloquizing non-human entities is thus crucial as a persuasive strategy in doing leadership and talking into being leader identity.

Second, Alice ventriloquizes non-present human actors (the personnel), and through ventriloquizing them she claims to know what they are thinking and so communicatively construct the organisation. She uses this as a rhetorical strategy because it builds consensus
for her version of organisational reality and so makes it more persuasive (Smith 1978).

Further, Alice is able to use her position in the organisation to ventriloquise her hierarchic superior. Thus through ventriloquizing non-present human actants who are further up the ‘chain of command’, she is able to make her version of organisational reality more authoritative and thus more susceptible to compliance from the senior teachers.

Third, Alice also ventriloquizes the present senior teachers and through doing this she constructs a version of what they want, so integrating their ‘wants’ into hers. By forming a hybrid identity of Alice plus senior teachers she claims to speak on their behalf to know what they want. She thus recruits their assumed agreement and alignment with her particular version of organisational reality.

However, ventriloquism is not the only strategy that is employed, and at times it is more persuasive to use a non-hybrid identity. This can be seen when Alice defuses the potential criticism that despite doing their best the senior teachers still face criticism that ‘they are doing nothing’. In this case, by using the first person pronoun (‘I’), Alice affiliates with Liz’s stance showing maximum empathy. Thus at times the ‘personal touch’ is employed as a strategy rather than hybridity which would dilute the sincerity of a ‘person-to-person’ exchange. Also at other times, the structure of talk is enough to ensure influence in the process of influencing the communicative construction of the organisation. This can be seen on the occasions that Alice claims epistemic primacy and so polices Liz’s claims to author what is going on in the company and through Alice’s use of skip-connecting to circumvent Nigel’s irony.

Ventriloquism is not however a discursive resource that is only in the hands of the ‘leader’. Liz also uses the ambiguous ‘we’ to ventriloquize either the senior teachers, the organisation, or the senior teachers plus Alice the director. In this way she makes an assessment built on
various sources of authority (i.e., either the organisation: team consensus; or team consensus combined with a projection of what Alice also knows). However, using the sequential properties of talk and explicit agreement in a second position, Alice takes over the assessment and makes it her own thus preserving her leader identity. Despite this attempt to upstage Alice’s leader identity, it is noticeable that it is Alice who ventriloquizes the more authoritative, and thus persuasive, resources, such as the organisation, the budget, and organisational players who are further up the organisational hierarchy. Consequently, whilst certainly not wishing to challenge in any way work which sees leadership as distributed or shared (e.g., Choi and Schnurr, 2014, Schnuur and Chan, 2011), the findings of this paper would suggest that leadership, whilst not necessarily being commensurate with hierarchy, is skewed to superiors rather than subordinates. This is because it is only Alice who ventriloquizes more authoritative networks and through doing so, she claims epistemic rights to know that are commensurate with her hierarchical position as director of the centre and which are unavailable to the other participants. Thus through ventriloquizing the budget, the organisation and her superior she is making relevant her position in the company. Therefore, the findings of this paper suggest that the ability to ventriloquize certain (more powerful) actants may be bound to superiors and unavailable to subordinates. In sum, whilst leadership does not equate with hierarchy, the identity-bound ventriloquizing that Alice is able to do allows her to (1) author a strong version of organisational reality and (2) to make this version authoritative so as to achieve consensus. As Benoit-Barné and Cooren (2009:10) state:

> authority, it seems, exists between entitlement and negotiation, between already being entitled to act for x because of a recognised characteristics and being allowed to act for x through the emergence of one of several sources of authority in a given interaction.
Thus identity-bound access to more powerful actants allows Alice to manage the meaning of organisational reality and so do leadership in a way that is conducive to acquiescence and surrendering one’s own ability to have an opinion, which is at the heart of authority (Lukes 1979: 642) and the dynamics of leader/follower identities. Thus authority, in this case at least, is seen to go hand in hand with leadership as those with a superior positions in the organisation access what is classically defined as rational authority which is based on a “belief in the legitimacy of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands” (Weber 1978: 215).

Further, as Fairhurst and Connaughton (2014: 24) point out, prior leadership research has tended to emphasise the human element and has generally ignored the hybrid nature of the social world. Leadership is perhaps not just a question of psychological profiles or human interaction, but, as this paper demonstrates, it is distributed in terms the production of hybrid presences enacted through ventriloquism as well as in purely human terms. Consequently, this paper concurs with Fairhurst and Cooren’s (2009: 484) claim that “it is through the (conscious and unconscious) mobilization of a plethora of actants in situ that this person we call a leader manages to represent and incarnate as many (conscious or unconscious) reasons to follow him or her” (italics in original). This is not to say that ventriloquism is always essential to leadership, rather it is a strategy of influence that may, or may not, be adopted.

Finally, whilst this paper does not claim to offer a grand theory of leadership, it does seeks to say something about some aspects of leadership: notably that ventriloquism is one way in which leader identity is talked into being and that leader identity is not necessarily a purely ‘human’ affair. Despite the fact that this single case analysis remains a snapshot of the doing of leadership, the discursive resources that are deployed here may be observable in other
instances and further research would be need to ascertain this. However, despite these shortcomings, it is hoped that this paper adds something new to the emerging discursive trend in leadership studies and that, in the spirit of cumulative qualitative research, this makes visible further resources that social actors use to do leadership as in situ communicative practice.

References


Tourish, D. 2014 Leadership, more or less? A processual, communication perspective on the role of agency in leadership theory. Leadership 10(1) 79–98


Appendix 1 Transcription symbols used

(2.5) approximate length of pause in seconds

(.) micro pause

[word] overlapping utterances

: sound stretching

= latched utterances

excellent stressed syllable

>word< spoken faster than surrounding talk

((action)) description of action

Word ↑ rising intonation

Word ↓ falling intonation

( ) untranscribable text

(word) word unclear – transcribers best guess

°word° spoken more softly than surrounding talk