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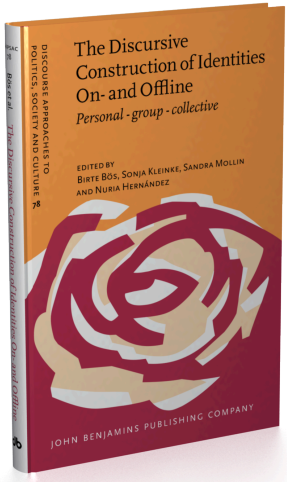

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The development of identity in *Batman* comics

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This chapter analyses dialogues in the American comic book series *Batman* for constructions of identity in fictional interaction. Far from remaining static, the characters develop as the plot progresses and their language reflects these changes. Although there are linguistic expectations for the members of Batman's team, these are not fulfilled by every character all the time. The analyses show how characters do or do not meet them. The identities are continuously shifting in reaction to the ongoing talk and one part of a participant's self is usually foregrounded in any given exchange. Even though some comic book issues in my data were published over a decade apart by different staff, each character is linguistically consistent enough to be recognizable, but simultaneously refashioned enough to befit the new identity.

Keywords: Batman, comics, conversation analysis, fiction, identity, interaction, membership categorization, relationality, superhero

1. Introduction

Comic book store shelves are teeming with heroes and heroines of nearly every kind. Some have supernatural powers, others are the kids next door and then there are those with extraterrestrial origins and forms. This is important to the success of the industry because many readers make purchases based on character likeability. Genre, movie merchandising and favourite authors and artists are also common motivations for first-time purchases, but the plot, carried to a great degree by the fictional cast, often determines whether the comic reader-viewers stick with the series and buy related (spin-off) titles. The general affinity to and identification with the story leads intensifies the reading experience (or viewing or listening experience or combinations thereof, depending on medium). Readers who like the story and identify with the characters have a more intense reading experience and are thus more likely to stay immersed in the fictional world (Hunt & Lenz, 2003, p. 9; Mandala, 2010, p. 119; Schlobin, 1982, p. ix; Stockwell, 2000, p. 213).

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Because they contribute immensely to the consumer's experience and enjoyment, characters and the details of their identities deserve scholarly analysis. Literary characters often seem more definite than real-life people (living or deceased) because readers have the feeling that they know them in and out (Forster, 1985, p. 57). The *out* applies to comic book characters in particular because they are drawn and their stories are often published regularly over decades. Their identities are complex structures which are continuously shaped by artists, writers, editors and readers who evaluate not only explicit comic content, but also the many scenes in the story which are neither directly shown nor described.

The character in focus in this chapter is Stephanie Brown, who is part of publisher DC and artist-creator Bob Kane's *Batman* universe. By tracking linguistic markers of identity, I analyse how she performs her identity verbally and how that performance changes as her identity develops. Stephanie's self is shaped and re-shaped in interactions with other characters and this, in turn, affects the identities of her interlocutors. The interactions between Stephanie Brown and Bruce Wayne are particularly revealing, as they adjust their language when assuming different situational roles. They disagree over some identities and show legitimization or rejection of the identities in play in specific exchanges.

This paper aligns with the idea that identity is created and shaped in interaction instead of being a fixed concept prior to the conversation (or any kind of interpersonal interaction) (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a, p. 588; 2005b, p. 376). Language is thus an essential tool for establishing identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005b, p. 382); however, it has not received its due attention in superhero scholarship. For example, Coogan (2009) and Ditschke and Anhut (2009) explore what constitutes a superhero, yet a style of speech does not figure into their depiction. The two concepts are linked very few times in the anthology *Superheroes and Identities* (Gibson, Huxley, & Ormrod, 2015), and never in a way that credits language as being a fundamental device that is in constant use. To my knowledge, talk in interaction has never been analysed in comics. It takes more than a codename or costume to make a superhero(ine) because this identity is only solidified once it is recognizable in the language, as my analyses show.[1] Identity and identity change are clearly marked by modifying language in the talk balloons to reflect the current state. Modifications are not limited to vocabulary, but also include the composition of verbal contributions such as length and grammatical form (e.g. interrogatives) and their appropriateness for

1. Writers can be attuned to language and identity connections as evidenced in an interview with Grant Morrison, who most notably shaped the character Damian Wayne (incidentally the current Robin). The Scot gives him an aristocratic air in his dialogue and laments that it is regularly dropped by other writers for "bratty" U.S. West Coast talk (Brooker, 2015, p. 47).

different identities, as well as the types of pragmatic turns (e.g. illocutionary acts such as disputing or commanding) acceptable for each rank.

Throughout this paper, I offer a simplified paraphrase of the transcribed comic book text to allow for sentences like *Batgirl told her she had everything under control*. A retelling which marks the cut between the story setting and publication world would be *The author and penciller and inker and letterer had Batgirl tell her she had everything under control*, but this is very tedious and can obscure the research findings. Although any character in the comic is, of course, directed by the team that produces the comic, my descriptions might often evoke the feeling that characters are identical to living and breathing people and speak of their own volition. While this simplified description allows a focus on the level of interaction between the characters, the interaction is best described as pseudo-interaction as it unfolds in the reader's mind from cues in the comics which are accessed by turning the pages.

My research corpus is a collection of American comic books, mostly from the series *Detective Comics*, *Robin* and *Batgirl*. To isolate the language from the art, in keeping with this paper's linguistic focus, the contents of talk balloons were transcribed before analysis. The text of comic book speech balloons possesses many traits of fictional dialogue (Section 3) but also reflects the special constraints of the medium (Section 4). Furthermore, as this particular character – Stephanie Brown – develops more and differently from many other characters, her specific situation as a character is elaborated in Section 5. Section 6 reviews frameworks for data analysis before applying them to my examples in Section 7. This is where I trace the linguistic development of this one character as she takes on three different superheroine identities over the course of 19 years of publication.

2. Data and methodology

The comics I use as data were published between 1992 and 2011 and feature the three Stephanie Brown super identities Spoiler, Robin and Batgirl. Each series released one issue monthly, but sometimes Stephanie teamed up with associates and appeared in more than one comic in a month. To facilitate comparisons, I selected the scenes which show Bruce Wayne's first interactions with each of her three incarnations (Bruce being the civilian who operates as his alter ego Batman). Spoiler's introduction stretches over two instalments, whereas Robin and Batgirl are each introduced in a single issue.

In general, time passes slowly in comics and one month's issue is often a direct continuation of the publication before it. Stephanie starts as a high school student and is a college freshman of about 19 when *Batgirl* ends. Her first masked crime fighter phase as Spoiler lasts longest: most of the 17 years between 1992 and

2009. She is most prominently pictured in the 183 issues of *Robin* and occasionally crosses over into other titles. The only interruption occurred between July 2004 and September 2004. In this period, six comics were published which showcased Stephanie as the first canonical female Robin (the name always given to Batman's mentee sidekick). This chapter in her history ends with her being fired by her mentor. It lasts 71 days in story time, although she is inactive during the last three weeks in order to physically recover from battle. Stephanie resumes her vigilante lifestyle immediately after being fired and appears as Spoiler the same month she was let go as Robin, albeit in another series (*Batgirl* 54, September 2004). She dies in December 2004 and is re-introduced as Spoiler in January 2008. Stephanie maintains this guise until the 2009 series, when she assumes the mantle of Batgirl and keeps it for the next two years. She takes the lead role in the 24 issues of *Batgirl* and makes guest appearances elsewhere. In 2011, the publisher DC discontinued *Batgirl* and Stephanie appeared as Batgirl only a few times in retrospective comics published after the discontinuation.[2] Except for the Robin phase, where Stephanie keeps a detailed journal of her adventures, it is not possible to determine how long each identity is active on the plot level.

The base of my research is formed by Bucholtz and Hall's (2005a) five principles for analysing identity in linguistic interaction: emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality and partialness. Their relationality principle, i.e. the assumption that identities are never autonomous and co-constructed with other social participants (ibid., p. 598), is most important to my approach. In *Batman*, superhero(ine) personas cannot be installed by anyone, but must be approved by Batman.

Following Bucholtz and Hall (2005a/b), I regard identity as emerging in talk – talk which can show different kinds of identity simultaneously, e.g. belonging to a general demographic group and a temporary one tied to a given exchange. Identity can be verbalized through many strategies including direct mention, implicatures and indicative vocabulary. Furthermore, identity is created through relations based on similarity, genuineness and authority and their counterparts. Because it is relational and context-dependent, a display of identity is always necessarily partial, never complete. The aforementioned framework is supported in this chapter by insights from conversation analysis (CA) about the relevance of speaker turns and their order (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974).

In the world of this comic book story, Batman authorizes identities of individuals who aspire to become sidekicks or independent hero(in)es. Stephanie Brown is such an aspiring individual and seeks to signal adherence to his heroic team through language use (cf. Bucholtz & Hall, 2005b, p. 377). As Spoiler and Robin,

2. These issues are not part of my data.

Stephanie tries but fails to adjust her language and attitude to meet the standards set in the narrative by Bruce Wayne as Batman (which in reality, are set by the publishing team to reflect how they believe their hero(ine) should speak). Her non-conformist style at this point is perceived as a weakness and failure and leads Batman to position her as a non-group member (ibid., p. 372). Batman only grants Stephanie the superheroine identity she covets once she operates as Batgirl.

3. Fictional dialogues and worlds

Although comic book language has special features, it shares many features with narrative and scripted language that appears in other genres, such as novels or TV shows. Scripted language for television can be perceived as a "surrogate for speech in real life" (Richardson, 2010, p. 106) because it imitates it, but adjusts and abridges it in order to adapt it to the medium. Since the audience cannot ask for repetitions and immediately replaying scenes for clarification is undesirable, if not impossible (depending on how the movie or show is viewed), the talk needs to be enunciated and unambiguous unless the opposite is desired for the sake of the plot. The screen time is limited and thus most disfluencies common to naturally occurring spontaneous speech (such as false starts, hesitations, overlap, longer pauses, etc.) are omitted (ibid., p. 45). Screenwriters generally follow the maxim that "no dialogue should be included that does not advance the plot. Characterization through dialogue is allowed only to the extent that it respects this principle" (ibid., p. 82).

Considerations about the effective implementation of talk also apply to comics. Where movie directors gauge time, comic book editors have to manage limited page space. To ensure comprehension, any language disfluencies or nonstandard spellings (perhaps to imitate an accent, drug-induced ramblings, talk by a computer etc.) must be introduced cautiously. The 24 issues of *Batgirl* (the third DC *Batgirl* series) replicate many features of spoken language, often through playful use of font and talk balloons (such as balloons with multiple mouthpieces (also called *tails*) leading to different characters to represent identical, simultaneous speech). This creative use of font is rare in novels, short stories or related forms of literature. One can imagine using different sizes of font for whispers or shouts and then omitting or adjusting certain verbs to report direct speech, but this is uncommon, even in children's literature,[3] and these graphic representations of orality remain practically unique to comics.

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3. Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series is a mix of comic book and diary. It includes many comic book panels and uses conventions such as capital letters for emphasis even in the text that is outside of talk balloons. Similar conventions are also used in online written communication.

The dialogue of any fictional text is constructed with a goal in mind, such as plot or character development. The talk needs to be appropriate for the fabricated world and the fabricated situations and speakers within it. It is therefore not necessary that it be an exact replica of naturally occurring talk. More than passively mirroring it, the language of fiction actively "constructs a particular version of language and the world" (Stamou, 2014, p. 123; also Stamou, 2017, p. 1). Because the world of *Batman* imagines extreme depictions of how crime is committed and fought, some aspects of this constructed world will be relatable to audiences and others will not. The language in comics is best situated somewhere in the middle of a continuum which has fictional language use as a mirror of reality at one end and language use as a meaning-making process at the other end (Stamou, 2014, p. 122). Readers piece together the information transmitted via words, images and sequence to understand the rules of the fictional world and how characters operate in it.

This world of the text is called the *storyworld* by Kukkonen (2010, p. 40). It is a mental model based on cues from the pages which locates the events, characters and settings which are described (ibid., p. 47; Kukkonen, 2013, p. 19). Readers "use the mental model to draw inferences about what has happened in the story and to project what is going to happen" (Kukkonen, 2010, p. 47). Their attention is turned to this storyworld and any inferences made pertain exclusively to it (Kukkonen, 2013, p. 19). Each model has its own possibilities and probabilities (ibid., p. 24). The comic in hand (or other work of fiction) is part of the consumers' and creators' real world, but the characters and happenings detailed therein exist only within the storyworld.

4. Reading for character and identity construction in comics

Most audience members have, to some degree, been conditioned to evaluate fictional dialogue and they hear or read the dialogue as identity construction (Richardson, 2010, p. 127). In comics in particular, characters are never truly a blank slate, as their appearance (hair or costume colours, for example) already suggests early judgments about their personalities and/or affiliations as hero(ine) or villain. Eder, Jannidis and Schneider deduce that as readers/viewers, we not only "make use of our knowledge about persons in understanding characters, but also our knowledge about character types, genres and the protagonists they typically feature, and the rules of specific fictional worlds" (2010, p. 13; also Culpeper, 2001, p. 105).

A superhero(ine) from the publisher DC comes with expectations and audiences anticipate a certain level of physical fitness, intelligence, moral orientation and probably even a sorrowful character biography. Many of them are known to people who have never read a comic because of their successful story retellings

in movies, television shows, video games, theatre performances, music and pop culture in general. With such wide-spread impact across media, countries and demographics, they might even be said to lead lives of their own that cannot be traced back to any one incarnation.

When reader-viewers piece together the identity of a fictional character, they do not arrive at a complete picture based on literature information alone. If details are unaddressed in the literature, then that is a gap that cannot be filled in a definitive way that makes it a canonical part of the character's being (Eder et al., 2010, pp. 11–12). The readership can fill in these blanks based on past reading and personal experiences and it is at this point at the latest that different readings and interpretations ensue. These tend to affect the internal properties related to the personality of a character, rather than external properties which comprise historical properties about the writer-artist's creation of the character (Reicher, 2010, p. 125). Reicher points out that the first set of properties may be the result of author or artist intention or "are determined by cognitive processes within particular readers or viewers" (ibid., p. 121).

The aforementioned gap-filling process is particularly important in comics, where it is called *closure* (McCloud, 1994, p. 63). It happens whenever a reader-viewer mentally completes a part of the story which is not directly presented. For example, one comic *panel* (i.e. picture) may show a character twice with so-called motion lines in between the two representations. The audience, by way of closure, is encouraged to deduce that the character ran from one place to the next. The same holds true for a journey of which several moments are shown in adjacent panels. The reader-viewer will suppose that a certain amount of time has passed and a certain distance was travelled and that much in the story took place in between the pictures in the *gutters*, i.e. the (usually white) spaces in between panels. Such artistic conventions (motion lines, or star-shaped art around a head to show surprise or around a hand to represent the force of a punch) belong to the repertoire of comic books. They are used in particular to visualize abstract phenomena such as time or emotions and the comic staff relies on the readers' ability to understand the conventions very quickly. The staff tries to appeal to as large an audience as possible and thus the stories are so constructed that most consumers will agree on most interpretations of the contents (Forceville, El Refaie & Meesters, 2014, p. 486). Unconventional images, though, like rare talk balloon shapes, allow for a wider range of interpretations. Details mentally added by individual readers like the speed of the movement, voice qualities, or what was done in what way on the journey will impact how they perceive the character performing the acts. The closure is performed via the cognitive processes Reicher (2010, p. 121) referred to. Here, the creators have much less control over the interpretation of the art and how this in turn effects the perception of the character. They strive for consistency

so that each character is viewed as the same in different issues and series, but that cannot be guaranteed. The readers' thoughts show immersion in the text by adding plot details which are not shown. Sometimes making a connection from one scene to the next will require effort and it is this constant interpretation of the material (composed of pictures, words and blank spaces) that differentiates comics from other media (McCloud, 1994, p. 92). Some (pages of) comics do not employ white gutters, but the sequential element remains. That is an argument for instead viewing words, images and sequence as the elements used to tell stories, as proposed by Kukkonen (2010, p. 43).

Considering the often decade-long span of some comic series and the many artist and writer changes throughout, one must question the impact that this has on the characters. Each comic team aims for consistency and does not recreate characters for each story or issue.[4] Readers who are not familiar with all appearances (like guest appearances in another series) do not experience drastically different characters.

Reicher (2010, p. 120) analysed the character identities in three types of narrative setups:

i. identity within a work or story;[5]
ii. a. identity across different works or stories; and
    b. identity across different episodes of a series (or across an individual work and a sequel of it).

Characters in serialized comics fit into the second and third categories. A character like Batgirl may well appear in other works such as *Birds of Prey* and, because she still has her own series, can appear in several issues altogether each month. Each issue of an ongoing series constitutes an episode of a larger plot, thereby making the last category (iib) applicable.

Reicher deduces that a character remains the same even if the team creating it changes and that internal properties are decisive. The identity changes continuously

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4. Characters can be drastically changed when the publisher redoes an entire comic series and deems earlier tellings of the story obsolete. Their histories are often erased and may not unfold the same way in the new story version.

5. A *work* is defined as having three parts: the element of the represented world which includes plot, characters, places etc. – (the *story*); the mode of presentation such as cinematographic or literary format and the individual components and the use thereof; and the element of the intended experience which includes the experiences the author(s) intend for the audience to have after exposure (be they emotional, cognitive or sensual). The same story might appear as different works, such as a play as a script or a theatrical performance or taping thereof (Reicher, 2010, p. 115).

in the story (at the very least, aging with the passing of time), but slowly enough that it is still the same character and recognizable as such (Reicher 2010, pp. 131–132). According to Reicher, each character can be analysed from two separate, but related viewpoints. One can analyse and describe the maximal character which is the version that "has all those properties as internal properties that [a character] exemplifies according to a given story" (ibid., p. 129). It is the more complete variant and is the character which the many individual appearances amount to. The maximal character is a combination of many sub-maximal characters. These portray a particular side of the character because each sub-maximal character has a subset of its internal properties in the story (ibid.). All sub-maximal canonical appearances make up the maximal character and reader-viewers see it from different angles. For example, Stephanie Brown is a brave soldier, a reckless fighter, a devoted daughter, a reliable friend, etc. These traits total her maximal character, but all traits are not shown in one issue. Instead, one or a few of them are foregrounded in an issue and that is then a sub-maximal Stephanie. By reading more work featuring her and discovering how the character acts and reacts in different situations, a reader meets more sub-maximal versions and arrives at a more complete picture.

The concepts of maximal and sub-maximal character correspond to Bucholtz and Hall's (2005a, p. 605) partialness principle, which to them is fundamental in the study of identity. Their claim is that identity constructions are always partial because of the influences of other parties involved, the context and ideologies at play (ibid.). This fractured nature of identity becomes evident in the different degrees of conscious intentionality and subconscious habit which shape the display of identity (ibid., p. 606). In real life, the self that one wishes to present and the identity that is perceived by others may be very different. This influence on identity from several parties is also apparent in a comic storyworld. Circumstances can be mirrored by the fictional cast in their pseudo-interactions as they negotiate and renegotiate their roles. The dialogues are of course scripted, but the writers are disregarded by the engrossed reader.

5. Characters in the DC *Batman* universe

The *Batman* stories operate on several conventions that are uncommon to other superhero series. These will be outlined as they are important to understanding the identity dynamics. One such convention is a unique rule which assures Batman immense power and influence over all characters in the *Batman* universe even if he is not present. Having conducted much research on language and identity, Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (1994)

> do not believe that the ability to negotiate speaker identity in a communicative event is shared equally by all participants. In most communicative situations, […] it is quite obvious that subordinate speakers are not as free as superordinates to negotiate their own or the other interactant's identity. Generally speaking, every communicative event incorporates some power imbalance (e.g. knowledge, status), and the person with greatest power has the greatest ability to define subordinates' roles and identities. (Meyerhoff & Niedzielski, 1994, pp. 317–318)

Batman is the character with the greatest power and this circumstance impacts Stephanie Brown's development substantially. In my data, Batman is a "[structure] of institutionalized power and identity" which Bucholtz and Hall (2005a, p. 603) identify as an integral part of their relationality principle. Batman represents such a structure in the storyworld and has the power to affirm or dismiss identities within it. He alone has the power to bestow upon Stephanie one of the coveted titles and declare her venture a success. She is aware that she needs Batman's sanction to patrol Gotham City and always (though more or less explicitly) tries to earn his approval. Until she receives the sanction, she has three superheroine identities as Spoiler (the rejected vigilante), Robin (a failed sidekick) and finally Batgirl (an accepted heroine). These different identities are reflected in pseudo-conversations with Batman.

Their relationality principle in general describes the assumption that identities are never autonomous, but are co-constructed with other social participants (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a, p. 598). It is of particular importance in the *Batman* universe because a superhero identity in Gotham can only be co-created with the authority Batman. He chooses the members of the team with whom he shares his territory and any rookies have to adhere to his rules – which, significantly, include conversational etiquette. As Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p. 126) point out, discourse identities come with category-bound obligations. The *Batman* universe is different from many superhero series in that the super-identities are roles and categories which can be assumed by anyone deemed fit by Batman. Since the individuals have no supernatural powers,[6] theoretically anyone could become Batman if he himself loses or relinquishes the role. This explains how a superhero(ine) title like *Robin* can apply to different characters at different points in time. For example, there were five canonical Robin characters in 2011. The same character can also be granted different masked identities (as in the case of Stephanie Brown). The roles along with their attached duties must be executed correctly, though, or the characters are met with opposition by others and pressured to give them up.

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6. More precisely, the members of Batman's inner circle do not have supernatural powers. Villains regularly have such exceptional skills because, e.g., they were victims of scientific experiments.

6. Conversation analysis and the comics data

Batman's team has a common language that is essential to its work. Any rules, responsibilities, goals, and strategies are communicated clearly to ensure order within the group so that missions (usually revolving around protecting Gotham City) are successful. Much is revealed about this language by applying CA. By looking at the order and nature of speaker contributions, CA shows the step-by-step creation and detail of a text. It provides insight into indexical signs of identity development with its turn-by-turn scrutiny of talk in interaction. I use it to show that identity is dynamically moulded in specific turns of the dialogue. CA is traditionally applied to naturally occurring talk. Since the comic book text is heavily scripted rather than spontaneous, my work is CA-informed instead of being a puristic example of such research. However, I want to encourage the application of frameworks to uncustomary data. Stamou (2017) does the same when analysing television sitcoms with the methodologies of critical discourse analysis and language ideology. As she states at the end (ibid., p. 8), different approaches, if circumspectly applied, can yield new insights and highlight the complexity of the data. In this paper, CA tactics uncover how fantastic superheroes and superheroines are fleshed out in pseudo-interactions.

In some ways, comic book data are easier to analyse than natural conversation because the discussion topics are often stated overtly to illuminate the real-life reader who, rather than the fictional story cast, is the intended audience. The characters have no real-life equivalents and the audience cannot make many inferences based on personal experience. The text therefore incorporates extra cues to guide the reader.

Sacks (1989) developed an additional framework to support CA research, namely membership categorization analysis. It is "concerned with the organisation of common-sense knowledge in terms of the categories members employ in accomplishing their activities through talk" (Francis & Hester, 2004, p. 21). The categories in a society are inference-rich and contain information and ideas about the category members which are shared by that society as a whole (Sacks, 1989, p. 272). The approach is an effective way of broadening CA which has been criticized for largely ignoring social context because it only works with the spoken words. In its most conservative application, CA only factors what is said overtly into the data. Example (2) (Section 7.1) includes a strong membership category orientation which is not mentioned specifically, but can be inferred. In this example, a character sees herself as a member of the superhero category, but her talk reveals her to be so firmly rooted in a more common category that she is not granted the transition into her desired group by Batman and cannot assume any of the identity traits that come with the membership (Sacks, 1989, p. 279).

7. From Spoiler to Robin to Batgirl

A character that undergoes substantial development is Stephanie Brown. She is introduced as a supporting cast member and eventually stars in her own comic. Stephanie starts out as an underdog who never quite succeeds at superheroing and finally turns into an autonomous heroine who is respected by all. This transformation is evidenced linguistically in her interactions with other characters, as can be outlined with Bucholtz and Hall's framework (2005a/b).

7.1 Phase 1: The mutual construction of the Spoiler identity

In their first meeting (and the first panel in which they are shown to interact) Spoiler and Batman (who Spoiler does not know is Bruce Wayne) immediately discuss identity, thereby making it explicitly relevant to the discussion. They ponder the identity of a corpse (Example (1), line 1) and, more importantly, seven lines later Batman asks the newcomer about her self-selected superhero moniker, wondering who he is discussing the crime with.

Example 1. *Detective Comics* 648, August 1992

1	Bruce	THE AUTOPSY FAILED TO COME UP WITH AN IDENTITY OF THE BLAST VICTIM. BUT IT WASN'T ARTHUR BROWN.
2	Steph	I'M BETTING THEY USED THE BODY OF CUTTER STARK. HE WAS THE LEADER OF THE GANG UNTIL MY FATHER KILLED HIM.
3		THEY MUST HAVE REALIZED I WAS LISTENING IN SO THEY ONLY LET ME HEAR ENOUGH OF THEIR PLANS TO THINK MY FATHER WAS GOING TO KILL BATMAN.
4	Tim	SO THEY WILL BE PULLING OFF THE ROBBERY TOMORROW NIGHT.
5		SHE SAYS THEY'RE GOING TO WAIT UNTIL ELEVEN O'CLOCK AT THE CLIMAX OF THE TELETHON.
6	Bruce	THAT'S WHEN THE MOST CASH WILL BE ON HAND.
7		AND THE MOST PEOPLE CROWDING THE MALL FOR A DIVERSION.
8		WHAT DO YOU CALL YOURSELF?
9	Steph	WELL…
10		… THE SPOILER.
11	Bruce	I LIKE THAT.

Batman behaves as is expected of him by presenting himself as undisputed leader and boss. Befitting his reputation as a brilliant scientist and the world's greatest detective, he reports autopsy results (line 1) and explains the reasoning behind the criminals' plans as explained by Robin (Timothy "Tim" Drake, lines 6–7). He also expresses an interest in his new potential (at least temporary) colleague (line 8) and

then approval upon hearing the name she has chosen (line 11). The characters are getting on well at this point in the tale and Stephanie is on her way to becoming an ally by helping Batman and Robin prevent a crime.

In the next example, Stephanie as Spoiler wants to present herself as the superheroine she believes she is. This view of herself is initially confirmed by Robin (line 13) who addresses her by her crime-fighting name and asks her to take part in the ongoing discussion of the planned robbery and the thwarting thereof. The agreeable mood is shattered when Spoiler realizes that she is not their equal. Batman issues a directive with a brief explanation (line 15 *Make it fast. We'll need time to get there.*) and Spoiler acknowledges the pressure and agrees to comply (line 16). However, she interprets Batman's *We* to include herself. By virtue of his power to give orders, Batman performs the act of excluding her (line 17 *You're not going with us, Spoiler.*). It is mitigated by the declarative form and the use of her superhero name at the end functions as a softener to limit the damage to her face (Goffman, 1967).

Example 2. *Detective Comics* 649, September 1992; a direct continuation of Example (1)

12	Bruce	THE CLUEMASTER STRIKES AT CASTLELAND PARK AT ELEVEN TONIGHT. THAT'S TWENTY MINUTES FROM NOW.*
13	Tim	HOW'S THE PLAN ON PULLING THIS ONE OFF, SPOILER?
14	Steph	I'LL TELL YOU WHAT I KNOW.
15	Bruce	MAKE IT FAST. WE'LL NEED TIME TO GET THERE.
16	Steph	THEN LET'S HAUL. I CAN EXPLAIN THE WHOLE SCORE ON THE WAY.
17	Bruce	YOU'RE NOT GOING WITH US, SPOILER.
18	Steph	SAY WHAT? I'M GOING TO GET MY PAYBACK AND THERE'S NO WAY YOU CAN STOP ME.
19	Bruce	THIS IS MORE THAN SOME PRIVATE VENDETTA YOU HAVE AGAINST YOUR FATHER.
20	Tim	BATMAN'S RIGHT. THINK OF ALL THE PEOPLE THAT COULD GET HURT BY WHAT CLUEMASTER WILL DO TONIGHT.
21	Steph	WHY'S HE GET TO GO ALONG AND I DON'T? I'M OLDER THAN HIM.
22	Bruce	I'M NOT ARGUING WITH YOU ABOUT THIS AND I'M NOT NEGOTIATING. IF YOU TRULY WANT YOUR FATHER CAUGHT THEN YOU'LL DO AS I SAY.
23		REMEMBER, STEPHANIE, WE KNOW WHO YOU ARE UNDER THAT MASK.
24	Tim	IT'S THE ONLY WAY, SPOILER.
25	Steph	ALL RIGHT.
26		HERE'S THE PLAN.

* Note that the crime cannot possibly be scheduled 20 minutes from *now* if eight lines (that is, moments) before it was scheduled for *tomorrow 11pm*. This is not a copy error, even though the two issues were created by the exact same staff members.

The utterances in line 18 inflict the first wounds to the Batman-Spoiler relationship that eventually take years to heal (about four within the story and 18 in publication). The general sidekick or newbie hero identities come with obligations which Spoiler rejects. She questions, even challenges Batman's decision, and gives her agenda a higher priority than his. Batman immediately addresses this challenge and offers a brief explanation for his decision, that the current ordeal between herself and her villainous father, the Cluemaster, is more complex than a regular father-daughter dispute. Robin elaborates in line 20 by mentioning *all the people* Stephanie did not consider, but she dismisses all arguments in line 21. She tries to control the exchange by shifting the focus to Robin and a perceived age-related right. Batman is scripted as not playing along (line 22) and he maintains control of the development of the conversation. To elicit compliance, he appeals to the sincerity of her claim that arresting her father is her priority.[7]

Next, Batman increases the pressure on her to comply by using her civilian name (line 23). This is a subtle threat because it highlights his power to interfere in her private life. He knows her identity and even has support (*we* includes his mentee, Robin). Batman enjoys greater status and overall more knowledge than Stephanie (see Section 5), even though she knows some details he lacks about the current heist. By calling her *Stephanie*, he irrevocably assigns her the role of civilian rather than superheroine and try as she might, her character cannot re-negotiate it in this pseudo-conversation. She finally pretends to give in and reveals the necessary details of the crime. She resists the identity assigned to her by Batman and only feigns insight. She heads to the scene of the crime to confront her criminal father anyway.

On the page, it is ostensibly Batman who hinders or renders possible this identity change of Stephanie's within the storyworld. In reality, his character is used by the comic staff to insinuate that they have decided to slow or advance the plot by making these decisions. The entire storyline works like this, but other instances will not always be pointed out in the rest of this paper.

Stephanie tries to present herself as a new superheroine. The name makes a good early impression (Example (1), line 11), but she does not perform successfully in dialogue. It was her tacit duty to assume a position beneath the legendary Batman, but she is unruly and defiant. In the identities intersubjectively constructed here, Stephanie and Bruce cannot agree on the former's role. Even though he has the in-story authority to accept her, Bruce does not legitimize her super identity and instead foregrounds her civilian position. He strips her of her self-selected moniker,

7. She shared this goal of hers with Robin a few panels earlier and readers may assume that it was shared with Batman off-panel because this specific scene is not pictured.

uses her given name and reminds her of her everyday home life (Example (2), line 23). Stephanie's services are rejected and she is a failed vigilante.

Returning to Sacks's (1989) membership categorization analysis, I argue that Stephanie does not speak like a heroine, but instead reverts to the role of a complaining child (lines 18, 21). She is still developing her superheroine skills, and those include talking appropriately. She reverts to conversational patterns she knows from family interaction, and the talk about her father, the Cluemaster, may have triggered her reaction (e.g. line 21 *Why's he get to go along and I don't? I'm older than him*[8]). Bucholtz and Hall's (2005a, pp. 591–592) positionality principle highlights the fluidity of identity in interaction and such temporary identities (like that of a child) often accompany more stable identities. Her language generally reveals her belonging to the groups "youth" and "female", but her language is infantile in Example (2) and she projects the identity of a child. On the surface, Stephanie's backtalk may seem like a comical outburst (superheroes are rarely shown as whiney) or a strategic move (though unsuccessful), but a deeper look at the exchange reveals complex identity developments.

Ideas such as "older kids have more freedoms than younger kids" are pervasive in American society. The privilege to drive and the right to vote are also based on fixed ages, for example. These laws are mirrored in the storyworld, as evidenced by Stephanie informing Batman in a later issue that she is indeed old enough to drive (*Robin* 127, August 2004). She believes this age argument has a chance at success by pointing out an incongruity between Batman's decision to enlist the (presumably) younger person's aid and common practice. This practice, though, is suspended here and her argument is unconvincing. The overriding framework here is not based on age, but on the degree of Batman-supervised tutelage. Batman's style is adjusted to Stephanie's (it should have been the other way around in order for the young vigilante to appear professional) and he temporarily projects a parent identity. His response *I'm not arguing with you about this and I'm not negotiating. If you truly want your father caught then you'll do as I say* (line 22) is reminiscent of parent talk, a way of expression that seems to be more successful than the statement *You're not going with us, Spoiler* (line 17) considering its recipient.

Instead of appealing to Spoiler's knowledge that she is ill fit to fight, and because she has not accepted Batman as the ultimate authority, his is the language of a family head and an adaptation to her argumentation style. He dismisses her question, refuses to justify his decision and thereby evades Spoiler's attempt to direct his actions and the flow of the conversation. In Batman's estimation, Stephanie is not

8. It is unknown if this age comparison is correct and how Stephanie would know. She may be an unreliable informant. By way of closure, readers may assume Tim told her, but sharing such identity-compromising information seems out of character for Tim.

ready to transition out of the membership category of (unruly) child and civilian. Her argumentation displays a lack of maturity needed to work with him the way an assistant would. He does not admit her to the category of superhero(in)es and is wary of controlling membership. The behaviour within his inner circle shapes the image of the category held by its members and outsiders (Sacks, 1989, p. 276) such as civilians, other crime fighters and villains. Seeing as she already has father issues, it is no surprise that she ultimately denigrates and rejects Batman as helmsman and follows him to the crime site. Batman's verbal accommodation works for a short time, but he and Stephanie are fated to disagree on her position among the super-gifted actors. Only when Stephanie exhibits mastery of the language of the team – reflecting the discipline and self-control of a superhero – is Batman prepared to admit her. When this admission is pictured in the comics, it is evidence that the writers have decided to alter her language and change Batman's stance to make the story progress fluently in adherence to the rules of the world they created.

7.2 Phase 2: The emergence of Stephanie's Robin identity

The next phase of Stephanie's superhero development is her failed Robin phase. The Robin from the first two examples, Timothy Drake, gives up his title and role. Stephanie Brown volunteers to take his place and Batman agrees. He had coached her as Spoiler for a while in episodic training sessions when other crime fighters were scarce. Although this can be seen as a transition into the sidekick identity, I only count the mere six publications when Stephanie actually wears the Robin costume and is addressed with that name. This phase ends with her being fired.

A quick note on these previous irregular training sessions. These happen relatively close to her debut as Robin.[9] If one may assume that these stages were thoroughly planned by the writers, Stephanie will have signalled some superhero suitability to Batman in her verbal performance (*Batman Gotham Knights*, December 2001). *Performance* here is "highly deliberate and self-aware social display" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005b, p. 380) and in everyday speech it "involves an aesthetic component that is available for evaluation by an audience" (ibid., referring to Bauman, 1977). "In this sense, performances are marked speech events that are more or less sharply differentiated from more mundane interaction" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005b, p. 380). It is a process by which Stephanie conveys more than what

9. Her character debuted as Spoiler in 1992, the *rooftop express* example to be discussed is from 2001 and she becomes Batman's sidekick in 2004. Of course, the story time does not pass the same way as publication time. Some adventures may have been scripted as taking place closer together or further apart than the comic cover dates suggest.

the words mean literally (the semantic meaning), but she also shows her desired adherence to Batman's team via the pragmatic meaning associated with her vocabulary choice (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005b, p. 377; Stamou, 2017, p. 3). Over their communicators, Spoiler attempts to speak the way she has noticed the superhero crowd talk. She says, "OKAY, I TOOK THE ROOFTOP EXPRESS – I LOVE THE WAY YOU GUYS CALL IT THAT – "THE ROOFTOP EXPRESS" – I LOVE ALL THE LINGO. THOUGH I CAN'T FIGURE OUT WHY YOU SAY 'NEGATIVE' INSTEAD OF 'NO', SINCE 'NO' IS ACTUALLY SHORTER…" and later she reports, "I'M CONCENTRATING ON DISPARITIES, THOUGH, LIKE YOU TAUGHT ME. BY WHICH YOU MEANT "THINGS THAT SEEM KINDA TWEAKED," RIGHT?". Her text communicates her uncertainty about the correct language use to Batman (and simultaneously to the reader), as evidenced by her questioning of the vocabulary items *negative* and *disparities*. She puts on this performance to display her progress as a vigilante and to impress her trainer. Her linguistic insecurities reveal her immaturity (on Batman's scale of maturity as created for his character by writers) and obligate Batman to adjust his language or risk the consequences of incomprehension or misunderstanding on her part. Batman accommodates: "NEGATIVE. I MEAN, NO". Stephanie has not grown enough as a fighter to make it into Batman's inner circle, but such dialogue shows that her identity is noticeably developing in her favour prior to her in-story promotion to Robin. These cancelled training sessions again show a clash between the relations of authority and delegitimacy (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a, p. 603). Spoiler wants her heroine identity to be approved, but it is disaffirmed once more.

Stephanie is as determined as ever to make it in *the Batman biz* (her name for it in *Robin* 127, August 2004) and adjusts her language to match her new identity (Example (3) below). Identity is topicalized in lines 7 and 8 when Stephanie corrects Batman's term of address and encourages him to use a new one, *Robin*. Batman initially still orients to her child identity as in Example (2), as evident from his use of the fatherly tone of his admonishment *This is ridiculous, young lady* (line 11). Stephanie has bestowed the Robin title on herself, but it is only made official when Batman sanctions it (lines 20–21)[10] because he is the higher-status member in this interdependent relationship (cf. Meyerhoff & Niedzielski, 1994, p. 318) and legitimizing authority (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a, p. 603) for all caped crusaders.

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10. It is obvious that Stephanie is aware of the power of names not only here, but also in *Robin* 128 (September 2004) when Bruce severs their partnershi p. He uses her civilian name and she remarks, "YOU CALLED ME STEPHANIE, NOT ROBIN. I'M NOT SURE I LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT".

Example 3. *Robin* 126, July 2004; in the Batcave; lowercase font is Stephanie's private journal

6	Bruce	STEPHANIE?
7	Steph	NO, NOT STEPHANIE. NOT EVEN SPOILER.
8		FROM NOW ON, YOU CAN CALL ME ROBIN.
[…]		
9		Robin's War Journal. Day One.
10		I'm toast.
11	Bruce	THIS IS RIDICULOUS, YOUNG LADY.
12		THAT HOMEMADE COSTUME WON'T DO.
13	Steph	REALLY? YOU MEAN –?
14	Bruce	AND WE MAY HAVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR HAIR.
15	Alfred	BUT, SIR!
16	Steph	I made it! I'm in.
17		THIS IS SO TOTALLY COOL!
18	Alfred	SIR, MAY I SPEAK TO YOU FOR A MOMENT?
19		ALONE?
20	Bruce	DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING, ROBIN.
21	Steph	He called me Robin! Me! It's official!
[…]		
41	Bruce	LET'S GET ONE THING STRAIGHT. YOU'RE ON PROBATION, AND AS LONG AS THAT'S IN EFFECT, YOU DON'T LEARN ANY BIG SECRETS.
42	Steph	CHECK.
43	Bruce	AND THE FIRST TIME YOU DISOBEY MY ORDERS – EVEN IN A MINOR WAY – IS THE PRECISE MOMENT YOU'RE OUT. NO SECOND CHANCES.
44	Steph	DOUBLE CHECK.

It is obvious that Stephanie has learned self-control and shows deference to her mentor and leader. When he sets strict rules for their partnership, making her inferiority and limitations obvious (lines 41, 43), she produces minimal utterances of comprehension.

Although Stephanie's spoken language reflects a more mature, professional mindset, she regularly has vivacious lines such as line 17's *This is so totally cool!* This should not be evaluated as unprofessional verbal behaviour; she is a teenage girl living her dream of protecting Gotham as a member of the bat family. Expressing excitement immediately after being promoted to Robin is a safe outlet for that part of her personality. She signals her youth in other scenes when she confirms an order by answering with words like *gotcha*. The statements index her simultaneous positions in a demographic category (youth, female) and in the interactionally specific

context (sidekick) (Bucholtz and Hall's (2005a, p. 592) positionality principle). Behind the scenes at the publisher DC, the character Robin is meant to be a more lighthearted counterbalance to Batman (Dixon, 1991, p. 4;[11] Pearson & Uricchio, 2015, p. 22[12]). This is part of the character's external set of properties. Stephanie is part of the Robin tradition as she is the fourth person to take on that name, and she fulfils the expectations, as evidenced in her many cheerful and witty retorts. Being the new Robin, less serious dialogue is part of her sidekick category-bound discourse identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 126) as designated by the comic staff. The hope that Robin (who is always a child or youth) will bring some joyfulness into the bleak crime fighting business is sometimes expressed by the comic characters. Via these remarks in the panels, the creators shape expectations the readers have for the character and in the case under discussion, these expectations are met. In going along with Stephanie's quips, Batman is finally legitimizing her super identity as his sidekick Robin, even though it is undecided if this identity will definitely be granted.

As Robin, her response is much more measured and compliant than the fuss and challenge she makes in Example (2) (*I'm going to get my payback and there's no way you can stop me*, line 18) and she displays heretofore unseen obedience. She is willing to follow his lead in order to progress. In lines 20, 41 and 43 above, Batman adopts a hard-liner boss identity and only when Robin accepts his position of power does Batman take on a teacher identity when interacting with her. In a later comic, (Example (4) below) we find a school-typical exchange in which Bruce tests his new pupil:

Example 4. *Robin* 127, August 2004

1	Bruce	TAKE A LOOK AT THESE VICTIM PHOTOS. NOTICE ANYTHING FAMILIAR?
2	Steph	OH, MY GOD.
3		THEY ALL SORT OF LOOK LIKE TIM.
4		THE KILLER IS HUNTING TIM.
5	Bruce	NOT EXACTLY.
6		I BELIEVE SOMEONE'S KILLING ANYONE WHO MIGHT BE ROBIN – THE PREVIOUS ROBIN.

Batman never assumed this teacher identity with Spoiler. Example (4) shows a three-part initiation-response-feedback CA sequence as is typically found in classroom settings (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975, p. 21). When Batman asks *Notice anything familiar?* he knows the answer, but is checking Robin's understanding. By acting like

11. Dixon is a *Batman* writer and created Stephanie Brown.

12. This is an interview with former *Batman* editor Dennis O'Neil.

a teacher, he positions Robin in the student role and Robin in turn affirms Batman's teacher self by responding the way a learner would. In this way, the two partners position each other temporarily in these roles (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a, p. 594). The identities Batman displays are usually those of hero, leader or teacher, sometimes donning more than one simultaneously. In the six comics which feature Stephanie as Robin, it is the teacher identity which is most dominant.

Stephanie has matured considerably since their first meeting. She is now able to practice restraint. She finally accepts the linguistic obligations that come with her role and learns to submit to the hierarchy she wants to belong to. This brings Stephanie closer to being able to present a heroine identity that everyone recognizes and validates. By saying the right things or sometimes nothing at all in other scenes, she encourages Batman to teach and train her. Her appropriate (verbal) behaviour prompts Batman to engage her by asking questions and assigning her tasks in a way that helps her grow as a warrior. Stephanie's stint as Robin comes to an early end after a fight in which Batman takes a severe beating. Robin panics and engages the enemy without permission, leading to a termination of the partnership. Even though Batman has taught her and she has learned to talk the talk, her impulse control is still deficient. She has not yet internalized the identity of a sidekick – it is more temporary than it needs to be if she is to serve Batman well.

7.3 Phase 3: Constructing and legitimizing the Batgirl identity

After her time as Robin, Stephanie returns to acting as Spoiler and is eventually given the Batgirl costume by the then reigning (officially second) Batgirl, Cassandra Cain. Cassandra gives her the costume, but her title is not universally acknowledged, in part because Bruce Wayne is in hiding and has little opportunity to affirm or reject her "promotion". Her title is only sanctioned by Bruce later on and the conversation in which this takes place shows that Stephanie has mastered the "talk" of a superhero.

At their reunion in Example (5), Stephanie takes control of the flow of conversation early on (all in the issue *Bruce Wayne the Road Home: Batgirl* 1, December 2010). The two are alone and she delivers a monologue divided into 17 adjacent talk balloons and seven panels, dominating the conversational floor. The interaction is smooth for this reason and the content reveals finer details of the new identity which is described by Stephanie as "MY NEW LIFE". She says she used to worry about losing the Batgirl title and re-assigns speaker rights when she tells Bruce, "YOU DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO TAKE THAT AWAY FROM ME – BAT-SYMBOL OR NOT". Her monologue continues:

Example 5. *Bruce Wayne the Road Home: Batgirl* 1, December 2010

1	Steph	AND FOR A CHANGE I'M NOT A) CHASING AFTER A BOY OR B) ACTING AS A PAWN IN ONE OF YOUR GAMES.
		[…]
2		BEING BATGIRL IS THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE I'M DOING THINGS BECAUSE I WANT TO.
3		BECAUSE I THINK THEY'RE THE RIGHT THING TO DO.
4		I'M TRYING TO LIVE MY OWN LIFE NOW, AND TRYING TO HELP PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS. AND I…
5		Deep breath!*
6		… REFUSETO GIVEUPBEING BATGIRL PERIOD.

* The lowercase text indicates thought. The lack of spaces represents a faster pace of talk in the succeeding line.

She employs the relational tactics of both *authentication* and *denaturalization* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a, pp. 601–602). She describes her new identity as authentic and motivated by the best of reasons. She now has the status to openly criticize actions she dreads from Batman. By denying him any veto right, she subverts the rightness of his own perceived identity to include preventing her rise as Batgirl (ibid., p. 602).

Setting the record straight on her motivation is very important for receiving approval from Bruce. Her first attempt to make a name for herself was unsuccessful because Bruce disapproved of her egocentric longing to take revenge on her father. In line 1 (Example 5), Stephanie describes Spoiler's "need to both please… and obsess" (as Bruce writes in his casebook later in that issue) because she wanted to impress Batman and date Robin. One might call her a creature of relation, augmenting her degree of likeness by downplaying differences to be more attractive to either member of the dynamic duo, a tactic Bucholtz and Hall (2005a, p. 599) term *adequation*. In a later issue of *Batgirl*, Stephanie puts her conviction to help others before any kind of title like *hero* (*Batgirl* 21, July 2011). In the scene which includes Example (5), Bruce literally lets her have the last say and although he does not call Stephanie "Batgirl" in this scene, he does so in his notebook (excerpts from which are shown on the last page of the issue) and commends her growth in his absence. He explicitly addresses the differences to the Spoiler identity and that Batgirl has changed for the better.

8. Conclusion

The proper language is a fundamental skill any *Batman* character must master in order to proclaim a super identity. The confidence and certainty Batman reveals in his talk solidifies his status as premier superhero. Being able to adjust his speaker role to manage working with people who have different agendas makes him a successful leader. There are linguistic expectations and privileges which accompany the characters depending on their status. Only independent fighters enjoy the power to give orders, whereas a recruit in training like Robin must show deference.

The many levels and layers of identity construction in comic book dialogues become visible by applying the framework developed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005a/b). Tracing the lengthy linguistic in-story history of just one character, in this case Stephanie Brown, reveals that all five principles play a role in shaping the projections of the story cast. The application of the framework exposes that identities are emergent in talk and a hero(ine) may speak like a parent or teacher as the situation requires. The speaker can position herself or himself as belonging to different groups at the same time. In this way, Stephanie's talk shows her to belong to the broad demographic groups youth and female because of her choice of words, but also to the narrow local group of sidekick, as she utters words related to the role at that stage of her development at all (words of confirmation, agreement, uptake etc.). Because identity display requires adapting to the ongoing interaction, it is a relational phenomenon and constantly being validated, dismissed or altered by or for other speakers. In the story world within the *Batman* comics, an identity is only legitimized when Batman addresses the person by the proper title; i.e. the sidekick status is only official if he uses the name *Robin* rather than a civilian name or other description (such as *young lady*, Example (3), line 11). An individual does not have full control over her or his identity; it is always shaped in social engagement. Finally, the character that is presented to us is always partial and one side of that person will be exposed clearer in one scene than in another. Within a few panels (Examples 1–2 which are one continuous scene), Batman transitions from an organizing leader to an admonishing father. These are all parts of the whole Batman identity.

The identity framework is supported by CA and membership categorization analysis. These deliver insights about the characters based not only on what is said, but also when it is said in the dialogue and how it is used to achieve an act with that identity. Not all identities in play are obvious by being overtly stated (by using a name or rank), but all are active and impact the direction of the verbal exchange and character development. Sometimes they are revealed in the structure of the exchange (e.g. initiation-response-feedback sequences involve teacher and student roles), recognizable from general expressions used by category members (e.g. *young*

lady used by parents), or from very specific lexemes that associated with a select group (e.g. *rooftop express* used by team Batman). Applying these strategies can unveil the simultaneous identities that make up an individual.

Although the *Batman* story is completely fictional, language is undeniably a crucial tool used to craft the characters the same way it persistently shapes real-life people. On one level, the way a character speaks in any given interaction says something about that character's identity, but because identity is intrinsically relational, it can simultaneously provide insights about the interlocutor's identity, like when speakers position each other. In comics, the re-creation of a super-identity (a promotion from novice to professional, for instance) is usually obvious by a new name and costume and maybe even a new comic book series. This chapter has uncovered that such a development is also accompanied by a new style of speaking and being spoken to. A complete analysis of identity must therefore indispensably include an analysis of linguistic interaction.

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