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If a Pundit Falls in the Forest and Nobody’s Around...

‘Having’ versus ‘Doing’ Expertise in Broadcast Talk.

On Expertise.

• Controversial matter in psychology. Vast body of work.

• Typically addresses quantity of ‘retained knowledge’ or range of ‘acquired practical skills’ necessary to be considered an ‘expert’ within given communities.

• Skilled memory theory (Ericsson & Stasiwski, 1989).

• Germain’s Expertise Scale (Germain, 2006).

Brutal Summary.

• Expertise itself generally (cognitively) conceptualised in terms of an individual’s possession of privileged/specialist knowledge/skills.

• Research on expertise/expert knowledge dedicated to measurement thereof.

• Approach often problematic when faced with some ground-level questions...

‘Expert Knowledge’.

• Two problems here: ‘Expert’ and ‘Knowledge’. Is the expertise the property of the expert or the knowledge? Rarely satisfactorily resolved.

• If somebody accrues specialist knowledge but never actualises it, could they be realistically considered an ‘expert’?

• Trees and forests:

  • That knowledge makes no difference in the social world.

  • ‘Expert’ is surely a social identity – defined in terms of comparisons.

Moreover.

• If the same knowledge is produced by the accredited expert and then parroted by ‘the man down the pub’...

  • The knowledge itself might retain status of ‘expertise’ (if properly credited, perhaps) but;

  • Does not necessarily confer the identity of ‘expert’ upon the new holder of the knowledge, even though they do now actually hold it.

Internal State?

• In everyday life we don’t assess what is retained. This is invisible.

• We assess what is USED, how and by whom.

  • Gilbert Ryle (1930) and ‘understanding’

  • Social criteria, defeasible achievement terminology.

  • Subject to contextual argumentation and verification.

• How do we actually assess who are the ‘real’ experts in our fields?

  • Quality of teaching skills?

  • Quality/quantity of research output?

  • Both are subject to argument, and various social criteria applied by different groups.

  • Students and peers?
Measurement.

- Psychologists themselves – despite some claims to the contrary - can't access knowledge of any form outside of social discourse.
- Expertise in lay and academic communities is assessed through social reproduction of propositional and procedural knowledges.
- Subject to situated process of construction and interpretation.

Pragmatically, However:

- An expert's credibility swings on an understanding/belief from a given audience that the speaker is indeed an authentic 'expert'.
- Expertise has to be 'done' or performed effectively in situ to be seen as 'expertise'.
- People pervasively and microscopically attend to this matter when lecturing, giving conference papers, writing books and so forth.

The Research.

- Project: Explore the practical methods through which knowledge is actualised as 'expert knowledge' in concrete contexts.
- Taking broadcast expertise as example – directed at wide audiences, and easy on the ethics!
- Rise of expert punditry a prime feature of all broadcasting over the last twenty-five years. Especially visible in sports, which is today's example.
- Vastly more time now allocated to this form of broadcasting.
- Using transcripts and video evidence from the BBC's 'Match of the Day' and 'Football Focus', though findings apply rather more widely.
- Painstaking research, obviously.

Discursive Psychology.

- Differs from conventional psychology in that it has no explicit focus on internal 'thought processes' (see Edwards & Potter, 1992; Edwards, 1998).
- Does not try to explain why people do things; it's more about describing how we use language to do social actions, and produce action-oriented versions of the world (internal and external) in particular social contexts.

Foundational Principles 1.

- Borrows extensively from Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1992), though eschews high technicality in favour of stronger topic-focus.
- Talk is constructed with reference to how it will be heard, and thereby subject to socio-contextual organisation, not simple or 'neutral' reflection of speaker's thought process.
- E.g. This paper built around my presumptions regarding this audience.
- Rather different to how I might deliver similar materials in first year lecture.

Foundational Principles 2.

- All talk is reflexive; it says as much about the speaker as the topic.
- Freedom Fighter/Terrorist.
- Specific word-selection performs clear social actions with tangible local consequences; you wouldn't mix them up by accident!

[Search for practical ‘methods’ for doing stuff – the structures of social action.]
Three Broad Methods for ‘Doing’ Expertise in Broadcast Punditry.

1. Visually (Directorially) Initiated.
2. Self-Initiated.
3. Other-Initiated.

Visually Initiated.

- Visual captioning during topical passages of talk.
- Regular – 15 to 20 minutes.
- E.g.:
  - ‘Lee Dixon: 458 Appearances for Arsenal between 1988 and 2002’
  - ‘Alan Shearer: 283 goals in top flight football’
  - ‘Alan Hansen: 620 League and Cup Appearances for Liverpool.’

Visually Initiated.

- Exclusively viewer-directed, and therefore produced almost solely for the purpose of reinforcing ‘expert’ identity of speaker.
- Recurrent reminder of speakers’ ‘rights’ to address a topic in this context, and to be broadcast – authority issue.
- Factoids are:
  - Sometimes general, sometimes specifically tailored to local topic of discussion.
  - Specifically chosen to maximise inferable expertise.
  - Facts which could potentially contradict authority of expert avoided – ‘times sent off’, for example, unless number is so low as to imply sainthood.

Self-Initiated.

- The ‘expert’ himself (in this data always a man) makes explicitly or tacitly relevant his own rights to answer a question or make a point on a given topic.
- Two broad means evident in the data:
  - Experience-based self-initiation.
  - Association or community-based self-initiation.

Experience-Based Self-Initiation.

- Tasked largely to the local interaction, and particularly vivid when a grand or contentious point is being made:
  - Hansen: ‘I’ve been in football for nearly 40 years and I’ve rarely seen a better game.’
- Explicitly flags up personal experience and, thereby, reflexively attends to defensibility of claim - functions a bit like ‘I saw it with my own eyes’
- Renders it difficult to contest statement without implicitly challenging vantage (or sanity)
- ‘I am [X] and I think [Y]’ generally used when speaker reasons that the claim is potentially contestable.

Association-Based Self-Initiation.

- Again, tasked largely to the immediate context.
  - O’Neill: ‘As Brian Clough would have said, and as just about anybody he managed will tell you, football is all about hard work. You can be as gifted as Ronaldo all you like, but if you do as little work as he did, you’ll be as anonymous as Ronaldo.’
- Makes relevant both a renowned expert and a wide community or making a criticism of Cristiano Ronaldo.
- Displays orientation to contentious nature of subject by way of reference to Clough.
- Reflexively aligns himself with a community of expertise.
- Common discursive method used by academics when dealing with potentially contentious subjects.
Other-Initiated.

• Work done by a speaker other than the specific ‘expert’ to reinforce their expert status.

• Directed at both the local interaction itself and the viewer.

• Two main forms:
  • Pre-Talk Other-Initiation.
  • Post-Talk Other-Initiation.

Pre-Talk Other-Initiation.

• Implicit and structural:
  • Chiles: ‘So, first-up, I've been watching that shocking defensive display, what do you think of Chelsea’s chances this season?’
  • Culturally we tend to refer/defer to the most ‘knowledgeable other’ first – specific allocation of turn makes reflexively available pundit’s particular expertise in defensive football to listener.

• Explicit identity work:
  • Lineker: ‘Well, that was some goal…’ [as he Theresa’s identity as a prolific goalscorer, and thereby addresses authority to comment on the issue.]

Post-Talk Other-Initiation.

• Allows for reassessment of prior talk, e.g. as validation of cliché production.
  • Chiles: ‘Did you discuss that front three with a striker up front for their own rate in this case?’
  • Lineker: ‘Yeah, at the end of the day, this game’s about goals.’
  • Lineker: ‘Absolutely, and nobody knows more about goals than you!’

• Retrospective work on potentially bland cliché by redirecting attention to Shearer’s own experience, and thus his entitlement to make the ‘expert’ claim.

• Displays inference by Lineker that Shearer’s statement might be hearable as bland cliché.

• ‘Authenticity’ issue.

Core Themes 1.

• The talk analyzed recurrently makes relevant a common-sense, rather than official, model of ‘expertise’.
  • Expertise = Experience.
  • Expertise = Qualifications.

• Appeals to a more broadly cultural model of expertise – consistent with ‘public targeting’ of broadcast and aligned assumptions.

Core Themes 2.

• Also, regularity of attendance to ‘expert identity’ issues by producers, pundits and hosts indicates inference that what is being said has potentially contentious status as expert knowledge.

• Football pundits can be seen to locally, microscopically attend to the given concerns regarding their status as experts in terms of authority and authenticity:
  • Experience in the field.
  • Place in community.

• Not dissimilar concerns to those that academics might attend to when giving papers at conferences!

So, What is an ‘Expert’?

“A man fifty miles from home with a briefcase.”

Will Rogers
Ta!

• And that's it from me...