

# On doing being personal

## Citizen talk as an identity-suspending device in public debates on GMOs

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### Introduction

As we have seen in other contributions to this volume (cf., especially, the contributions to part III), participants to public hearings may draw on 'expert' or 'citizen' identities so as to socially position themselves in these meetings in specific ways. In this paper, we will focus on the use of the category 'citizen' in a public debate on genetically modified crops entitled 'Eating and Genes' (*Eten en Genen*) in the Netherlands.

It seems obvious to associate the category *citizen* with activities and features in the sphere of public rights and obligations (cf. the introduction to this volume). However, when we look analytically at instances in which a speaker describes himself as a citizen, we see how the use of this category does not reveal a direct orientation towards the kind of issues that are common-sensically bound up with the notion of citizenship. Rather, we can observe how the category is used as a device for accomplishing a shift in the ranking of locally relevant identity types.

The participants in this debate carefully distinguish between contributors who participate 'just' as a member of the public and those who participate in a professional capacity, i.e. as representative of an organization or as an expert. Participants who identify themselves as an expert or institutional representative may also draw upon the category of 'citizen'. Interestingly, the categorization construction 'as a citizen' is *typically* used by such participants. They produce this description only as a second-occasion device, i.e. after a first-occasion categorical identification relating to their professional involvement. It is through invoking the citizen identity that they perform specific interactional business: they display personal involvement and, at the same time, exclude official responsibility for their private concerns. Furthermore, the category shift takes place in such a way that the initial official identity is not excluded or deleted, thereby leaving it to co-participants to decide to what extent next utterances can and should be treated

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as connected to an identification in terms of the citizen category. Our aim in this paper is to describe how self and other descriptions as a 'citizen' are used as a device for accomplishing these kinds of interactional work.

### Categorization and identity

We see 'citizen' as a category label that can be used to describe a specific type of public identity. Sacks (1972a/b and 1992) explores how categorization of persons is used by members of a culture to make their world orderly and intelligible. Social events are described, understood and evaluated by perceiving them in terms of category-bound performances. The ways in which members act in their social world and the ways in which they talk about it can be explained in terms of *membership categorization devices* (MCDs) that provide social orderings that members use as the basis for their sociological reasoning. As Halkowski (1990: 568) puts it, following Sacks:

(...) when a speaker categorizes someone, hearers can and will perform an operation on that category so as to find the device from which that category was used. By employing a particular membership category, a speaker thus provides a resource through which other can figure out how to fit the referenced person into the talk-so-far. By using these categorization devices to reference persons, interactants make their talk understandable.

Members can categorize a person in a number of ways, and the selection of a specific category is matched to the contingencies of the occasion and partially constitutive for it (see Schegloff 1972). A category label such as *citizen* can be used to refer to a person or a group of persons as a specific type of public or political identity. It is different from the class of category labels that describe professional roles such as *cook*, *engineer*, *minister*, or *professor*, although any subset of such a collection may be associated with situated systems of sociological reasoning. Which set of categories constitutes a collection, or what is oriented to as a categorization device, is the result of situated and task-oriented interactional work. Categories are grouped together relative to the contingencies of the task at hand (see Jayyusi 1984 and Mazeland *et al.* 1995). In this paper, we will examine what kind of situated relevancies govern the selection and use of the category *citizen* in the public debate on the genetic modification of plants.

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## Data and setting

For our analysis, we selected fragments from audio recordings of debates, hearings and conferences in the context of the so-called Public Debate on Biotechnology and Food (*Publiek Debat Biotechnologie en Voedsel*) which took place in the Netherlands, between June 2001 and January 2002. This debate was already called for by the parliament in 1999 and the request was subsequently incorporated in the Integral Policy Document on Biotechnology (*Integrale Nota Biotechnologie*). This document outlines past and future developments, and formulates policy intentions concerning modern biotechnology in general and genetic modification in particular. On behalf of four Ministries, the Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (*Minister van Volkshuisvesting, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieubeheer*) presented the policy document to the parliament in September 2000. In this document, it was stated:

(...) that the cabinet has decided to focus the public debate on the ethical and societal aspects of modern biotechnology and food. The aim of the debate is to clarify the preconditions under which biotechnology with respect to food is acceptable for society. The intention is, in 2001, to launch a debate that will reach the general public, including stakeholding organisations. The actual debate will be preceded by an extensive public information campaign. The cabinet will use the outcome of the debate to evaluate and modify its policy if necessary. (*Integrale Nota Biotechnologie*, 2000:32) [authors' translation]

Responsibility for the debate was delegated to the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries (*Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuurbeheer en Visserij*). The Ministry appointed the Temporary Committee on Biotechnology and Food (*Tijdelijke Commissie Biotechnologie en Voedsel*) also known as the Terlouw Committee, named after its chairman Dr Jan Terlouw (a prominent former politician and commissioner). The committee was instructed to guide the public debate and to deliver a final report to the Minister of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries (*Integrale Nota Biotechnologie*, 2000:32). The committee organised the debate according to three 'debating circles': closed discussions by 150 selected Dutch citizens, divided by age (the 'inner circle'); debates by 50 societal organisations, initiated by the organisations themselves and supported by the Terlouw Committee (the 'middle circle'); and public meetings, initiated, organised and attended by -members of- the committee (the 'outer circle'). Eventually, on 9 January 2002, the final report was submitted to the Minister of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries.

The fragments that we present here are taken from recordings of two public meetings (the 'outer circle') organised by the Committee on Biotechnology and

Food. These extracts are taken from a sample of fourteen recorded meetings deriving from the middle and outer debating circle, consisting of more than sixty hours of talk. The analysis concerns work-in-progress, and at this stage we do not want to make any bold generalist claims about the materials. In this paper, our aim is to make a more theoretical point by putting forward a research phenomenon that deserves further attention, and that as such will ultimately inform further analysis over a larger data corpus. Our analysis up till now however indicates that we are dealing with a recurrent phenomenon.

### Speaking ‘as a citizen’

We begin our analysis with a fragment from the first part of a local public meeting. This meeting was organized by the Terlouw Committee as part of the public debate on Biotechnology and Food. On this particular occasion, the organizing committee had a single representative, Professor Wis. He was seated on a platform in front of the audience – of approximately 30 people –, together with an external expert and the Technical Chair. The meeting opens with the chairman giving the floor to Wis, with no further introduction:<sup>1</sup>

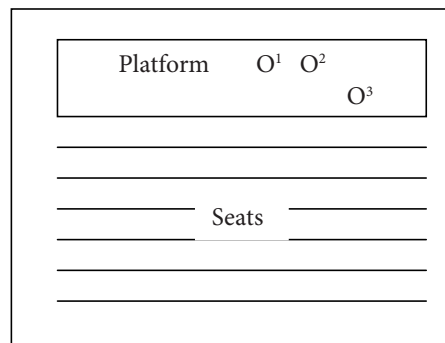
(1) Local debate (1), autumn 2001

- 0            [ (14.0)  
              | ((noises can be heard: whispering, coughing, the pushing of a table,  
              | footsteps))
- 1    Chair    ik wou u nu het woord geven om t'op<sup>↑</sup>penen,  
              *I now would like to give the floor to you in order to open*
- (0.6)
- 2    Wis →    [pr<sup>↑</sup>ima. ik ben Koen ↑Wis eh: ik ben lid van de Commissie  
              | *that's fine. I am Koen Wis*    er I am member of the Terlouw  
              | Committee  
              | ((speaking through microphone))
- 3            Terlouw en (.) eh: namens de commissie Terlouw (1.1)  
              and (.) er on behalf of the Terlouw Committee (1.1)
- 4            van harte ↑wel↓kom. ik wil drie vragen (0.5)  
              *a hearty welcome. I have three questions (0.5)*

- 5            bespreken die wij [...]   
               *to discuss that we [...]*

Professor Wis introduces himself by stating his name and describing himself as a “member of the Terlouw Committee”. He formulates his self-identification as functional and suitable for the occasion by immediately revealing how he, as a speaker, is involved in the proceedings. He is a member of the organizing committee. Moreover, this identity accounts for what he is doing and in which capacity. As one of the organizers, the speaker has the right and the obligation to be the first to address the audience and to welcome the members of the audience on behalf of the Committee.

Notice how this identity construction is also achieved at the level of spatial configuration. The spatial organization of the room in which the meeting is held, and the distribution of participants within the room, provide information about the participants’ identities.



O1: chairman

O2: external expert

O3: member of the Terlouw Committee, Professor Wis

**Figure 1.** Spatial organization local debate (1)

The officials and the guest speaker are seated on a platform, facing the audience. The audience sits in front of the platform, facing the ‘stage’. Participants on stage have pre-allocated identities that are contingent to the occasion. Somebody who speaks on stage simultaneously claims and constitutes this type of identity. The primary identity of participants in front of the platform is the situated, locally achieved identity of being a ‘member of the audience.’

The aspect that is more directly relevant to our analysis, however, is the fact that the speaker introduces himself as a member of the Terlouw Committee. From all the possible categories that could have been selected for self-description (for

example, a professor specialising in X and Y from the University of Z), Wis describes himself in terms of a category from the collection of categories that is suited to account for his involvement in the proceedings. The speaker self-identifies as a person who has an official function at the event. He presents himself as speaking in charge of the committee – and he does so at the first possible opportunity. We will call this the *primary situational identity* (cf. Wilson 1991, Zimmerman 1998) and the occasion on which it is formulated the *first identity-construction position*. In a setting such as a public meeting, first identity-construction positions are oriented to as default slots for introducing the speaker's primary situational identity.

After Wis has introduced himself and welcomed the audience, he begins to explain why this public debate was necessary in the Netherlands (not included in the transcript). In the course of his explanation, Wis produces another type of self-description: he qualifies himself 'as a citizen' (see line 11, example 2 below):

(2) Local debate (1), autumn 2001 [about 2 minutes later in Wis' opening statement]

- 1 Wis [...] eh::m (0.7) >zoals ik zei niet alleen in Neder↑land<  
[...] u::m (0.7) as I said not only in the Netherlands
- 2 eigenlijk in (0.3) veel landen van Europa zie je dat ·hh  
but in fact in (0.3) many other countries in Europe you see that·hh
- 3 debatten gevoerd worden publieke debatten gevoerd worden jUist  
the debates that take place the public debates that take place are  
precisely
- 4 over ·hh °genetische verandering genetische modificatie of  
about ·hh genetic change genetic modification or
- 5 genetische° ·hh MANipulatie (0.4) eh:m (0.6) de termen zijn  
genetic ·hh manipulation (0.4) u:m (0.6) the terminology is
- 6 naar ↑keuze.  
optional.  
(4.3)
- 7 de politieke par↑tijen, (0.8) die over het ↑algemeen mediëren  
the political parties (0.8) who in general mediate
- 8 om dergelijke kloven te voorko:men (0.7) la:ten het nogal eens  
to prevent such gaps (0.7) quite often fail
- 9 afweten. (0.3) als u op 't ogenblik kijkt naar de debatten  
in this (0.3) if you look at the current debates

- 10        in de politieke partijen    (.) over dit onder<sup>↑</sup>werp (0.5)  
*within the political parties    (.) on this subject (0.5)*
- 11 →     dan (0.3) >zie ik in ieder geval als burger tot m'n ontstel<sup>↓</sup>tenis<  
*then (0.3) I see at least as a citizen to my dismay*
- 12        (0.5) dat er maar weinig partijen zijn die dit Echt serieus  
*(0.5) that there are only a few parties who take this really*
- 13        opne<sup>↓</sup>men >en dat zijn vaak kleinere partijen zoals bijvoorbeeld  
*seriously and these are often the smaller parties for example*
- 14        de ChristenUnie< ·hh die heeft net een Partijprogramma (.)  
*the Christian Union ·hh which just has published its manifest (.)*
- 15        gepubliceerd waarin ze een hele duidelijke (0.5)standpuntbepaling  
*in which they very clearly (0.5) set out their position*
- 16        (°maken°) die coherent is met hun politieke visie. (2.5) de  
*which is coherent with their political vision    (2.5) the*
- 17        Overheid in Nederland schoof het (.) hee:l lang voor zich uit.[...]  
*government in the Netherlands postponed it (.) for a very long time*  
 [...]

At the start of this fragment, Wis places the public debate in the Netherlands in a European context (lines 1–6). He then formulates an assessment with respect to the participation of political parties in the public debate (lines 7–9): they have failed in the mediating role they are supposed to play. The speaker then elaborates on this assessment by accounting for it with a more specific observation (*I see ... that only a few parties who take this really seriously*, lines 12–13). However, before delivering the observation, Wis first inserts a formulation of personal concern (*I see ... to my dismay ... that only a few ...*), preceded by a characterization of the identity in terms of which he is making this comment (*as a citizen*, line 11).

Note that, unlike the self-identification that was made in the first identity-construction position, the self-description *as a citizen* is not formatted as a separate statement. This time, the self-description is inserted as a preface to a statement that was already projected in the preceding talk. It is formatted as an adjunct in an utterance through which the speaker establishes himself as emotionally and personally affected. It is placed *immediately* before the speaker expresses his emotional involvement: *I see at least as a citizen to my dismay that ...* (line 11). The speaker does not make his second self-description in an organizationally specifiable slot similar to first identity-construction positions. Rather, its placement can be characterized as relative to the business that the

speaker performs immediately afterwards in the ongoing utterance itself. In doing so, the speaker confines the scope of his disclosure to a specific type of category, i.e. his identity as a citizen. He thereby resists attributing these ‘personal feelings’ to his official identity.

Interestingly, the speaker is not categorically excluding extension to other potentially relevant identity types: ‘*I see at least as a citizen to my dismay that ...*’ (line 10). In a more implicit way, the self-description *as a citizen* also portrays the citizen identity as optional and only locally relevant. It constructs the citizen category *as a role*, which can be adopted or rejected any time, and which is used next to other possible roles. In an interesting paper on role discourse, Halkowski (1990) discusses role as a device for shifting categories. He describes how the first identity category is substituted by a second, in such a way that the ‘initial device’s implicativeness’ is eliminated through the installment of a new category. In our case, however, the speaker *suspends* his official identity – without undermining it – by explicitly formatting the second self-description as a *local, temporary* category shift, i.e. (‘just’) a role (cf. the dynamics of social positioning in Bora and Hausendorf, this volume).

We observed a very similar use of the citizen category in another meeting that was part of the public debate on Biotechnology and Food. The discussion was organized as an expert hearing. The experts were invited to answer questions sent in by Dutch ‘citizens’ (sic!). An estimated one hundred people attended the meeting as members of the audience.

The meeting was scheduled in episodes that were considered to be more or less thematically coherent. In each session, a different expert was acting as the primary discussant. Example (3) documents the closure of the fourth episode and the opening section of the fifth and last episode:

(3) Expert hearing, The Hague autumn 2001

- |   |              |   |
|---|--------------|---|
| 1 | <i>Chair</i> | [ [...] ik dank u zeer hartelijk me↑vrouw      (.) mijne he↑ren<br>  [...] I would like to thank you very much madam (.) gentlemen<br>  ((speaking through microphone)) |
| 2 |              | (0.9) en ook de;      (0.3) vra:genstel↑lers (1.0) en ik zou<br>(0.9) and also the (0.3) the people who asked questions (1.0) and<br>now I would                        |
| 3 |              | graag meneer <u>Van</u> der Meer willen uitnodigen om achter de<br>like to invite mister Van der Meer to take a seat at   |
| 4 |              | tafel ↑plaats te nemen [...]<br>the table [...]   |



- 5 [...] (41.0)
- 6 *Chair* [...] ·hh dames en he↑ren meneer Van der Meer die heeft een  
[...] ·hh ladies and gentlemen mister Van der Meer has a
- 7 zee:r rij:ke er va↑ring hij is ·hh fr↑actievoorzitter  
*very wide experience he has ·hh been chairman of a parliamentary party*
- 8 geweest aan de overzijde van het Binnen↑hof ·hhh hij is  
*on the other side of the Binnenhof [Dutch parliament] ·hhh he is*
- 9 Minister van Fi↑nanciën geweest hij is ↑Eurocommissaris  
*a former Minister of Finance and former EU Commissioner*
- 10 geweest ·hhh heeft daar onder andere ↑Landbouw in zijn  
*·hhh his portfolio included Agriculture*
- 11 portefeuille ge↑had ·hh dus hij we:t van het reilen en  
*·hh so he knows how*
- 12 zeilen van de ↑overheid. ·hh en wij ↑dachten [...]  
*government works ·hh and we thought [...]*

The chairman introduces the next expert, Mr. Van der Meer, by describing his political career (lines 6–12). He focuses on the biographical aspects that are relevant to the topic of the particular session of the meeting, which is about the role of the government. Van der Meer is a qualified political expert. This expertise is used by the chairman to account for his role as primary discussant in the expert hearing (lines 11–12).

The fragment we wish to focus on is one of the question-and-answer sequences during the session in which Van der Meer, in his capacity as an expert, answers the citizens' questions. The fragment opens with the chair reading out the next question on behalf of one of the citizens who asked about plans to create a new food authority in the Netherlands. At the time, one of the sensitive issues in the discussion about this plan was whether this authority should be brought under one or more of the ministries, or whether it should have a completely independent status:

- (4) Expert hearing. The Hague autumn 2001 [about 4 minutes later in the session]

- 1 *Chair* [...] ·hhh wat is uw oordeel. vindt u dat er een volstrekt  
[...] ·hhh what is your opinion. do you think that a fully
- 2 onafhankelijke voedselautoriteit in Nederland zou moeten  
*independent food authority should be set up in the Netherlands*

- 3 ko↑men die voor de voedselveiligheid ·hhh zijn regels  
*to draw up food-safety regulations*
- 4 stelt en zich verantwoordelijk ↑voelt ·hhh of hoort  
*and has a sense of responsibility ·hhh or is this more a direct responsibility*
- 5 dat bij de overheid <directer thuis.> bij één of meer  
*of the government and one or more*
- 6 Departementen. ·hhh waar denkt u dat de burger meer  
*ministry departments ·hhh in which alternative do you think the citizen has more*
- 7 ver↑trouwen in heeft.  
*confidence.*
- 8 (3.2)
- 9 Van der Meer ja, ik I- kan moeilijk oordelen over, (0.6) de burger. hm  
*well, I- it is difficult for me to judge, (0.6) what the citizen thinks. hm*
- 10 → (1.4) >maar ik kan wel zeggen wat ik als burger vind.<  
*(1.4) but I can say what I as a citizen think*
- 11 Chair n↑ja, gr↑aag  
*well, please do*
- 12 (1.4)
- 13 Van der Meer → ik als vu- ik vind als burger dat de verantwoordelijkheid,  
*as vi- I think as a citizen that the responsibility*
- 14 (0.7) voor de voedselveiligheid in een land, (1.2)  
*(0.7) for food safety in a country (1.2)*
- 15 thuis hoort bij de overheid, mits die overheid  
*should rest with the government provided that the government*
- 16 democratisch (0.3) wordt gecontroleerd.(1.1)  
*is controlled (0.3) democratically. (1.1)*

17 ik geloof niet in absolute onafhankelijkheid. [...]  
*I do not believe in categorical independence. [...]*

In lines 9–10, Mr. Van der Meer first explains why he is unable to answer a question about what ‘the citizen’ thinks. However, notwithstanding his resistance against doing being an omniscient expert, he is able to give his *own* opinion *as a citizen* (line 10). Before doing so, he emphasizes one more time that he is saying this in his capacity *as a citizen* by prefacing his opinion accordingly (line 13).

Note how the speaker offers his view on the type of legal status that should be given to the new food authority as a (strong) personal belief (*I do not believe in categorical independence* (line 17)), and how he draws upon an explicit normative vocabulary (... *should rest with the government* (line 15)). If we compare this to the use of the device in example 2, we can observe how the self-description *as a citizen* is again used as a preface to a statement in which the speaker establishes himself as publicly revealing what he personally thinks. An identity that is different from the situated expert identity in terms of which the speaker is officially taking part in the event is made locally relevant by referring to it immediately before the delivery of a personal opinion.

Mr. van der Meer is invited to the expert hearing as a political expert. However, he does not present his opinion about the legal status of the new food authority as the judgement of a political expert. On the contrary, he frames it so that it is heard as the opinion of the speaker in his capacity *as a citizen*. The device is used as a technique for locally suspending the relevance of the speaker’s primary official identity. On the one hand, it forestalls (immediate) attribution of the speaker’s ‘opinion’ to his public personality. On the other hand, and at the same time, it provides the resource for the kind of reasoning that should explain the ‘opinion’ to which it is attached. The speaker is presenting his opinion *as a citizen* and *because of his membership of the category of citizens*.

The self-identification in terms of the category *citizen* does not exclude Van der Meer’s expert identity. Rather, this latter identity is preserved in parallel to his citizen identity. By constructing the citizen category as a role, it is left ambiguous to what extent his utterances can and should be taken as part of a citizen’s discourse. Notice, for example, how the ‘I’ in line 17 could be attributed to Van der Meer’s status as a citizen *and* to his status as an expert.

Not all categories may be suited for deployment as an identity-suspending device. It is intriguing to ask why the category *citizen* is used to perform this type of function in the context of the public debate. We will discuss this question in the next section.

## Being addressed as a citizen

Participants in a meeting may formulate multiple identities during the interaction. Some classes of participant achieve a primary situational identity because a pre-allocated role is arranged for the occasion. Until now, we have not considered the role of the audience, however. Their primary situational identity is being a member of the audience. The role of members of the audience is not pre-determined in terms of an arranged official status that is contingent upon the occasion. The primary dimension in which members of the audience accomplish their situational identity is in the organization of the spatial distribution of participants within the room. In the expert hearing from which examples 3–4 were taken, for example, former Minister Van der Meer first took the position of a member of the audience – albeit a prominent one. He was seated in the audience with everyone else. His primary situational identity changed into the status of expert discussant at the moment he was invited onto the platform to answer citizens' questions about the role of the government.

Before we explore yet another way in which participants to the public debate use self-categorizations *as a citizen* as an identity-suspending device, we will first make an observation that reveals an interesting difference between official participants and members of the audience. We did not find any use of the expression *as a citizen* as an identity-disclaiming device in contributions from members of the audience. They did not perform the kind of identity-splitting whereby officials temporarily suspend the applicability of their primary situational identity. Apparently, members of the audience do not need to distance themselves from an official identity when they take part in the debate. Of course, they do not have such an identity, so long as no attempt is made to change the primary situational identity as a member of the audience. The interaction documented in the fragment below is a useful illustration of this. The fragment is from the same public debate as example 1–2. After the introduction by Professor Wis in his capacity as member of the Terlouw Committee, the chairman invites members of the audience to give their reasons for attending the meeting. Mr. A is the third person who explained why he wished to participate. The fragment begins with a summary assessment of this part of his contribution (line 21):

(5) Local debate (1), autumn 2001 [after Wis' introduction, about 10 minutes later]

21 Mr. A [...] en (0.3) ↑*dət* °>vin 'k dus eigenlijk niet in de haak:<°.  
[...] and (0.3) so I think this is not quite right actually.

22 (0.7)

23 Chair ja

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- yes
- 24 (0.5)
- 25 *Mr. A* 't [ik wil dAAR BIJ zeggeh: eh: >ik wil geen verstopertje  
it I would like to add er I do not want to play hide-and-peek
- 26 *Chair* [( )
- 27 *Mr. A* spe<sup>↑</sup>len< eh eh\*: ik werk voor de >Alternatieve  
er er I work for the Alternative
- 28 Konsumenten<sup>↑</sup>bond< en wij zijn dus <sup>↑</sup>één van die vijftien  
Consumer Association and we are one of fifteen
- 29 organisaties ·hhh die >het debat overigens niet< (.)  
organisations ·hhh that are not boycotting the debate by the way (.)
- 30 boycotten? maar het vertrouwen <sup>↑</sup>opgezegd hebben in (.) de  
but we have revoked our trust in (.) the
- 31 commissie.  
committee  
[...] ((about 20 lines left out))
- 50 *Mr. A* we- ik [eh draag- we dragen wel bij aan eh initiatieven  
we- I er contribut- we contribute to er initiatives
- 51 *Chair* [<sup>↑</sup>en  
and
- 52 *Mr. A* van andere organisaties eh:  
of other organizations er:
- 53 *Chair* en m[ag ik u,  
and can I
- 54 *Mr. A* [die ons daar om vragen.=  
who invite us to participate
- 55 *Chair*  
→ =mag ik u een vraag stellen als (.)als bur<sup>↑</sup>ger [eh: u zegt  
can I ask you a question as (.) as a citizen er you say
- 56 *Mr. A* [<sup>↑</sup>ze:ker ja.  
yes of course
- 57 *Chair* van [waarom hè waarom doen doet 't bedrijfsleven dat  
why you know why do does the industry do this
- 58 *Mr. A* [(°uiteraard°)

(of course)

- 59 *Chair* waarom doet de wetenschap dat en >wat voor wat voor< houding  
*why do scientists do this and what is your what is your attitude*
- 60 heeft u daar dan tegen? is dat ·hh °een ↓een (1.0)  
*to issues like this is this ·hh a a (1.0)*
- 61 ge[voel van (0.7) wan°°trouwen of eh°°  
*feeling of (0.7) distrust or er*
- 61 *Mr. A* [ik vind zelf in eerste plaats volstrekt onnodig eh\*m °eh::°  
*I myself think in the first place that it is absolutely unnecessary um er*
- 62 *Mr. A* (0.9) als ik me afvraag wat voor eh: wat voor soort voedsel  
*(0.9) if I ask myself what kind of er kind of food*
- 63 voorziening (0.8)eh ik graag zou willen of: wat AKB eh::  
*supply (0.8) er I would like or what AKB er*
- 64 graag zou willen °is dat een ↑duurzame voedselvoorziening? [...]  
*would like is a sustainable food supply[...]*

After giving his reasons for attending to the meeting, audience member Mr. A makes a confession (lines 25–28): he works for the Alternative Consumer Association (AKB). Following this revelation, the speaker continues in a way that is clearly bound to his identity as a staff member of this organization. He first corrects a remark that was made earlier in the meeting about the position of the AKB in the public debate (lines 28–31) and then continues with a detailed explanation of the AKB's strategy (lines 31–50, not included in example 5).

Mr. A thus discloses that he is not 'just' an ordinary member of the audience: his 'real' identity is staff member of the AKB. The identity shift from member of the audience to representative of an organisation causes a problem for the chairman. In lines 55–62, he asks Mr. A whether his questioning of the motives of industry and scientists etcetera are motivated by feelings of distrust. Interestingly, this question is addressed to Mr. A *as a citizen* ('*can I ask you a question as (...) citizen,*' line 55).

The expression *as a citizen* is again used as a way to shift identities. Unlike the instances discussed above, however, this time the identity shift is not performed by the speaker but by his interlocutor. The chairman uses the expression *as a citizen* as a device for requesting a member of the audience to abandon the organizational identity in terms of which Mr. A just has identified himself. It is not quite clear whether the scope of this request for identity shift is only for the duration of Mr. A's answer, or whether it aims at effectuating a change of identity that will last at least for the duration of the meeting. Mr. A's professional identity is not so much

denied but suspended and once more, the scope of this suspension is left unclear.

We do not consider it a coincidence that the chairman addresses Mr. A in his capacity *as citizen* in an environment in which Mr. A just has altered his identity from an ordinary member of the audience to a person who is first and foremost a member of an organization. The members of this organization were not included in the arrangements for organizing the set of the meeting's primary situational identities.

Note that the question the chair addresses to Mr. A in his capacity as a *citizen* is related to Mr. A's 'feeling' and 'attitude'. As in the cases discussed above, the category *citizen* is again associated with personal feelings, attitudes and opinions about public affairs. The members of a culture may orient to identity categories as bound to specific types of actions, emotions, reasonings or evaluations (cf. Sacks 1972b). Participants in the public debate appear to treat personal feelings, opinions and attitudes about public affairs as a characteristic feature of citizenship. We will explore this latter aspect in more detail in the next section.

### The 'and also' quality of being a citizen

As we have seen, participants in the public debate might suspend their official identity by inserting a self-characterization 'as a citizen' in their contribution. Until now, we have seen (self-) descriptions in the following formats: 'as a citizen' I think/feel ... or 'as a citizen' what do you think/feel? In this section we will discuss a slightly different format. It has a different linguistic form, but shares relevant features of the 'as a citizen' device. The fragment is taken from a national conference on biotechnology and food organised by several NGOs who withdrew from the official public debate. Mr. Langeveld is member of an expert panel and is introduced by the chair as a representative of the CNV trade union (not included in example 6). Following a request, he is presenting the union's view on biotechnology and food.

(6) Conference NGOs, The Hague autumn 2001

- |    |                  |  |
|----|------------------|--|
| 23 | <i>Langeveld</i> | [...] en in hoeverre (0.5) <↑kan en ↓wij> die werknemer die          |
|    |                  | <i>[...] and to what extent (0.5) is the worker willing and able</i> |
| 24 |                  | verantwoordelijkheid nemen dus ik wil d'r eig'lijk nog een           |
|    |                  | <i>to take that responsibility so I actually would like to</i>       |
| 25 |                  | groep aan toevoegen dat is die (.) werknemer. (0.5) ik zit           |
|    |                  | <i>add a group that is that (.) worker (0.5) I myself</i>            |

- 26 hier zelf (.) als vertegenwoordiger van de CNV-bedrijvenbond,  
*am here (.) as representative of the CNV trade union*
- 27 → (0.6) maar ik ben ook >burger ben ook consument ik loop ook  
*(0.6) but I am also a citizen am also a consumer I also walk in*
- 28 In de wolken zit soms ook met m'n ↓hoofd in de ↑grond<  
*The clouds sometimes with my head in the sand too*
- 29 Audience °ha[haha°  
 30 Lange- [ehm (0.4) maar (0,4) eigenlijk zitten we met een heel  
 veld  
*um (0.4) but (0,4) actually we are confronted with a very*
- 31 raar f:enomeen zoals wij dat dan intern zeggen, (0.6)[...]  
*odd phenomenon as we say (0.6) [...]*

Preceding the first lines of this fragment, Langeveld calls for 'workers' to be treated as a special group with job-related risks and dilemmas, working in the context of genetic engineering, and he poses the question to what extent the worker is willing and able to take that responsibility (lines 23–24). After he finishes his plea by repeating his proposal (*so I actually would like to add a group that is that worker* (lines 24–25)), he does some remarkable categorization work.

Firstly, he re-introduces his initial official identity, but he formulates it *as a role* which is suited to the occasion: *I myself am here as representative of the CNV trade union* (lines 25–26). He then not so much suspends this situated identity by a self-description 'as a citizen', but adds the citizen identity to his organizational identity: *I am also a citizen* (line 27; our emphasis). Also being a citizen emphasises the additional nature of the citizen concept. Rather than eliminating it, the 'and also' quality of the citizen category maintains the validity of the participant's official identity.

Furthermore, in producing this aside, the speaker is presenting himself as someone with particular thoughts and feelings: *I also walk in the clouds sometimes with my head in the sand too* (lines 27–28). Apparently, the speaker mixes up two expressions, namely, being in the clouds and playing the ostrich [in English, the *literal* translation for these Dutch expressions is: 'walking with your head in the clouds' and 'putting your head in the sand']. This might partly explain the laughter of the audience in line 29. (We could speculate that the first expression is connected to the citizen category and the second to the consumer category, but for the present analytic purpose we restrict ourselves to the citizen category).

Similar to the 'as a citizen' preface, the additional self-description as '(and) also a citizen' is bound up with 'private' thoughts and feelings. Moreover, these thoughts and feelings are presented as somewhat dreamy by nature and irrespon-



sible, by which the speaker underlines their 'unofficial' status. Finally, as in the other examples, in his identity as a citizen, the speaker predominantly performs 'cognitive' actions, i.e. he portrays himself as a person with a mind in action, who is personally involved rather than keeping a distance. Interestingly, speakers use the citizen identity as a category associated with mental activities rather than, for example, behavioural aspects or appearance.

### Conclusion

We have seen how, in public debates on GMOs, participants predominantly describe themselves as citizens (or are asked by others to speak 'as a citizen') after *first* having been identified as an official or as an expert. The practice of describing oneself or another party *as a citizen* is thus specifically used for the construction of what we have called a 'second occasion' identity. By prefacing a statement with a self-characterization as a citizen, the speaker locally suspends the primary identity in terms of which he officially takes part in the event. In doing so, the speaker creates interactional space for the performance of unofficial, personal, informal business. He adds a personal touch to a public issue, while excluding official accountability for his views. At the same time, the speaker preserves his official identity by formulating the citizen identity as a role (*as a citizen*) or as an alternative identity in addition to others (*also a citizen*).

At least within the context of the public debate, we see how (self-identified or other-identified) representatives and experts draw upon this type of citizen discourse as a way of framing personal statements with respect to the matter at hand. By invoking the citizen category as bound up with mental activities (rather than, say, one which is associated with appearance or particular sorts of visible behaviour), participants actively underline their private and active involvement (cf. te Molder and Potter 2004).

At the same time, the device temporarily excludes the official and/or expert identity for doing this kind of work, thereby retrospectively defining it as interactionally unsuitable for displaying personal commitment or concern. This type of citizen talk thus carefully preserves and controls the traditional boundary between professional assessments and private opinions.

Interestingly, however, there are indications in our material that this boundary is also guarded by 'ordinary' members from the audience. 'Ordinary' participants also use the practice of characterizing oneself *as a citizen*. They do not do so, however, in order to temporarily suspend their primary situated identity; they rather do so to build a contrast between their way of taking part in the public debate and the biased participation modes of officials. Politicians, administrators,

representatives and experts do not not speak for themselves, whereas an ordinary member from the audience is not constrained *as a citizen* by whatever type of mandate or accountability exigencies. When an ordinary member from the audience describes himself *as a citizen*, he articulates features of the category *citizen* that are very similar to the ones implied by the devices we have discussed in this chapter. The participants in the public debate orient to speaking and acting *as a citizen* as a way of framing activities in terms of an identity that is stripped from its organizational, political or legal scaffoldings. Because it is used to highlight the private side of persons, identification in terms of the category *citizen* accounts for the public statement of individual thoughts, opinions and emotions.

The public debate on GMOs in the Netherlands was organized in order to consult the general public for clarifying “the preconditions under which biotechnology with respect to food is acceptable for society” (Integrale Nota Biotechnologie, 2000:32). Next to the techniques traditionally used in postwar parliamentary democracy, the public debate is a type of social arrangement in which the government creates a framework for involving the general public in the process of policy making with respect to the use of new technologies. It is the outcome of a form of governance that provides the preconditions for relatively new ways of constituting citizenship (cf. the introduction to this volume). Ironically, however, the participants in the public debate articulate identity features of the category concept *citizen* that are possibly not compatible with the notion of *citizenship* that lies at the root of the event. Whereas the notion of citizenship conceptualizes citizens as organizationally, politically and legally embedded social persons, the participants in the debate foreground the private, informal and cognitive character of the category.

## Notes

1. The transcription symbols used in the fragments of this article follow the system developed by Gail Jefferson:

| <u>Symbol</u> | <u>Meaning</u>  |
|---------------|---|
| (.)           | short pause   |
| (1,2)         | longer pause (with specification of seconds)                  |
| xxx=          | immediate onset of next utterance                             |
| =xxx          |   |
| xxx,          | slightly rising intonation, at the end of an utterance (part) |
| xxx?          | strongly rising intonation, at the end of an utterance (part) |
| xxx.          | falling intonation, at the end of an utterance (part)         |
| ↑xxx          | rising intonation in the next syllable                        |
| ↓xxx          | falling intonation in the next syllable                       |

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| xxx <u>xxx</u> xxx | stress  |
| xxx XXX xxx        | increase of volume  |
| xxx °xxx° xxx      | decrease of volume  |
| xxx: xxx:: xxx:::  | lengthening of sounds (the number of dots reflects the degree of lengthening) |
| xxx > xxx < xxx    | increase of speed   |
| xxx < xxx > xxx    | decrease of speed   |
| xxx-               | breaking off word production  |
| A: xxx /xxx        | overlap of utterances   |
| B: xxx /xxx        |   |
| (xxx)              | uncertain transcription   |
| ( )                | incomprehensible passage  |
| (( ))              | transcriber's comment on speech characteristics or on non-verbal phenomena    |
| [...]              | deleted utterance(s)  |
| ·hhh               | audible inhalation  |
| xxx*               | croaky  |

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