

Abstract

This research report examines telephonic and written data from an emergency medical services centre in the Western Cape and seeks to uncover the language practices that speakers use in order to create what I term “extraordinary emergencies”. Since one of the overarching institutional aims of the emergency call centre is that of “preservation of life”, the majority of emergencies are reproduced by emergency call-takers as routine events, specifically for the purpose of managing them most efficiently and thus working towards the institutional aim of preserving life. However, in certain instances, this institutional agenda is temporarily halted or abandoned in favour of a competing agenda, what I have termed the “personal” agenda enacted by the speaker. This personal agenda works to the reproduction of particular norms and values, and speakers are seen as morally accountable for reproducing them. This research report makes use of discursive analytic practices, specifically conversation analysis, as a method by which to highlight subtle and delicate moments in the interaction that recreate the shared value of the “sacred child” in real-time interaction.

Keywords: emergency, childhood, sexual assault, conversation analysis, institutions