Exploiting the partitioning constancy/inconstancy of Membership Categorization Devices: Evidence from age categorization

Apostolos Poulilos
Ilion Music School
appoul@gmail.com

Abstract
This paper explores the usefulness of Harvey Sacks’s notions of partitioning constancy and inconstancy of membership categorization devices (MCDs) for the study of age identity construction. Partitioning constancy and inconstancy were shown by Sacks (1992a, b) to be two properties of MCDs that establish members’ co-membership or cross-membership with other members. The relevance of these properties for age categorization is shown through the analysis of conversational fragments in which middle-aged or older people either distance themselves from the categories old or older person and their negative attributes or endorse these categories and their positive characteristics.

Keywords: ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, membership categorization device, age identity, partitioning constancy/inconstancy

1. Introduction
This paper adopts the Ethnomethodological approach to the construction of age identities by combining two strands of the Ethnomethodological study of talk-in-interaction, i.e. Conversation Analysis (CA) and, especially, Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA). Ethnomethodology studies the methods individuals use to create the social order within which they interact: it is interested in what Garfinkel calls the “background expectancies” (1967: 37), the commonsense knowledge that members of a society must have in order to function in society. Combining CA and MCA allows us to examine these expectancies or sets of commonsense knowledge as social objects produced during talk by exploring the ways in which talk “index[es] or constitute[s] social and cultural identities, roles, relationships, stances and activities” (Lepper 2000: 4). Therefore, social identities are analyzed as accomplishments of members in the process of everyday interaction.
The ethnomethodological study of identities in based on Harvey Sacks’s (1992a, b) notion of Membership Categories, as a reference to a person’s social identity is crucially linked to a reference to their membership of a specific category (Widdicombe 1998). According to Sacks, (1992a: 40) “a great deal of the knowledge that members of a society have about the society” is organized in terms of membership categorization devices, that is, collections of classes of persons and their activities: these are systematically used by speakers “to assemble ‘inference rich’ recognizable actions and descriptions” (Lepper 2000: 4) and to organize experience and knowledge of the everyday world.

Category-boundedness is a key notion in Sacks’s framework. Since activities\(^1\) are tied to specific categories, the members belonging to these specific categories are expected to engage in these activities. This allows us to hear a category as being implicated by a category-bound activity.\(^2\) Thus, the doing of category-bound action makes relevant for a person the category to which that action is bound as well as the MCD to which that category belongs; furthermore, it makes other categories of that MCD relevant for the categorization of other persons in the same scene (Schegloff 2007).

This paper focuses on an important property of MCDs: their partitioning constancy or inconstancy (Sacks 1992a: 590-594). Partitioning constancy\(^3\) refers to the fact that two MCDs can partition two members of the population identically. For example, two people may be co-members by reference to a gender category (for example, men) as well as to a profession category (for example, teachers). These two MCDs have partitioning constancy for these people. On the other hand, two MCDs may have partitioning inconstancy: each of them partitions two people differently. For example, the MCDs stage of life and profession may have partitioning inconstancy for a 30-year-old woman and a 60-year-old woman who are both teachers. Their job establishes a co-membership but their age establishes a cross-membership. As Schegloff (2007) points out, both “partitioning constancy and inconstancy can serve as vehicles for replacing the relevance of one set of category terms by another, and can thereby serve as cover or camouflage identities” because they mobilize

\(^1\) Subsequent researchers (Watson 1978, Jayyusi 1984) have extended Sacks’s concept of category-boundedness to include rights, entitlements, obligations, knowledge, attributes, and competencies.

\(^2\) This is provided by Sacks’s first “viewer’s maxim” according to which “[i]f a Member sees a category-bound activity being done, then, if one can see it being done by a member of a category to which the activity is bound, see it that way” (Sacks 1992a: 259).

\(^3\) Sacks (1992b: 110) also uses the term partitioning consistency.
“alternative bodies of common sense knowledge” (ibid.: 469) as being relevant to the members’ behaviour in a situation as well as their understanding of the situation.

The fragments analyzed in this paper show how speakers exploit the partitioning constancy or inconstancy of various MCDs in connection with the MCD stage of life in order to either distance themselves from less desirable categories of this MCD, that is, old person or older person or exploit the partitioning property of MCDs to align themselves with this category (Poulios 2011).

2. Distancing oneself from the category old

In this section older speakers distance themselves from the category old or older person and its negative attributes by orienting to partitioning inconstancy. In the first fragment, an elderly actress invokes the MCD theatre in order to distance herself from the identity old person to which she can be heard as belonging during a discussion about chronological age. Rena (V)lachopoulou, who is 69 years old, complains about references to chronological age. A few days after the revue that she stars in has opened, she is invited to the live television show Πρωινός καφές/Morning Coffee along with other members of the cast to promote the revue, which is a celebration of the centennial of the genre. Roula (K)oromila, 40, the hostess of the show, is talking to choreographer Fotis (Me)taxopoulos, 57, and the actors Sotiris (M)oustakas, 52. An (aud)ience is present as well.

Fragment 1 (Πρωινός Καφές/Morning Coffee, ANT1, November 13, 1992)⁴

1  f  K: Εδώ γιορτάζουμε τα εκατό χρόνια::: κύριε Μουστάκα (.)
       .h της επιθεώρησης και τα πενήντα χρόνια (.)
       [ε::: του θεάτρου Ακροπόλ.] Here Mr Moustakas we’re celebrating 100 years of (.)
       [u:::h of the Acropole theatre.]
2  m  Me: [Του θεάτρου Ακροπόλ.] [The Acropole theatre
3  (.)
4  →  m  M: Ναι και τα τριάντα τα δικά μου. Yes and my own thirty
         years.
5  K: heh heh heh heh heh heh heh

⁴ See Appendix for transcript notation.
When Koromila says that this revue celebrates the centennial anniversary of Greek revue and the 50th anniversary of the Acropole Theatre, Moustakas grabs the opportunity to make a pun on his age: he says that his thirty years are also being celebrated. Although his words can be preferably heard as a reference to his thirty years on stage, the application of what Sacks calls the “consistency rule” (1992a: 245) within the MCD *celebrants of birthdays* makes them hearable as a reference to his chronological age. His line makes Koromila laugh and the audience applaud. Vlachopoulou tries to intervene (12) but she is unsuccessful. Koromila talks about a birthday cake that should have been brought in for the celebration, whereas Moustakas adds that he never celebrates anniversaries. At this point Vlachopoulou
intervenes again (17) and expresses her annoyance at these references to age. She explicitly states that they have been invited to the studio to talk not about chronological age but about the revue. Thus, she denies the relevance of the MCD stage of life and prefers to stick to a discussion about the MCD theatre because the two MCDs have a partitioning inconstancy for her. Stage of life creates a cross-membership between Vlachopoulou and the guests as she is the eldest (in the company and the studio, in general). Theatre, on the other hand, allows her to claim co-membership in the company on the basis of her incumbency of the category actress or member of this specific cast.

Another case of partitioning inconstancy which helps a person distance herself from potentially negative evaluations regarding older age is evident in the following fragment, which also shows that even when age is actually talked about and revealed, age-telling is problematic for an older person. Dimitra (G)alani, 55, is about to present the next song.

*Fragment 2* (Dimitra Galani’s Concert at Patra’s Roman Theatre, September 2007, MDGal45.00) (simplified)

1  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G: Είναι ωραίο πράγμα ημουσική τώρα μη: μου πείτε.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>.hh Άμα μπορείς να κολυμπά:ς μέσα στη</td>
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<td>music is a great thing do:n’t you thi:nk so.</td>
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<td>.hh If you can swi:m in</td>
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<th>heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh</th>
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<td>[heh heh heh heh heh=]</td>
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<th>[heh heh heh .hh Το θυμά:μαι μετά: &gt;όταν κατεβαί:νω απ’ τη σκη[νή:&lt; αλλά:: (.)=</th>
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<td>[heh heh heh .hh I reme:mber it afterwards &gt;when I exit the sta:[ge bu::t (.)=]</td>
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<th>[heh heh heh heh heh]</th>
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5  

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<th>Επάνω στη σκηνή κάτι</th>
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<td>→ γίνεται (.) καλά: δεν είμαι και πολύ μεγάλη τώρα μην:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[Something happens on the stage (.) we'll OK I’m not too old now let’s not]</td>
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Galani tells the audience that thanks to her job she has forgotten how old she is. She starts explaining why this happens but cuts off and employs self-repair (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks 1977) as a way of distancing herself from the category older person (καλά: δεν είμαι και πολύ μεγάλη ηώρα μη:ν τρελαθού:με:). She appears to act defensively against the common expectation that she is treated as rather old by distancing herself from other members of her generation (Είμαι η νεό::ηερη απ': άλλους της γενιάς μου), as well as against the expectation that she is not telling the truth (αλή::θεια...κi εί:μ’ η νεό::τερη). The two MCDs (music and stage-of-life) present partitioning inconstancy for Galani: she is a member of a particular generation of singers but she is the youngest member of this generation. Co-membership with her colleagues in terms of music is important; however, cross-membership in terms of age also appears to be important.

3. Aligning with the category old

Let us now turn to fragments in which the partitioning constancy or inconstancy of MCDs is an important tool for aligning with the category old or older person and endorsing its positive attributes. The first of these fragments comes from a well-known reality show of the previous decade, The Wall, a version of the Big Brother format (see also Poulis 2009): sixteen contestants lived in a house that was divided by a wall into a luxurious half (the villa), in which the participants led a life of comfort, and a poor half (the farm), in which the participants had to cope with difficult weather conditions and survive with minimum equipment. The contestants’
moving to either half of the house was a matter decided upon by the housemates’ votes and their own performance in certain contests. Perhaps one of the best-remembered contestants was 53-year-old (R)oula. From the very first day of the show Roula started calling herself γυναίκα ‘old woman’. She thus explicitly invoked two MCDs that presented partitioning inconstancy regarding the female contestants on several occasions. For example, as the following fragment shows, whereas in terms of the MCD gender Roula was a co-member with other female contestants, she invoked the MCD stage of life as a resource for cross-membership that would allow her to enjoy the privileges of being an older woman in this context, that is, to avoid spending time on the farm and instead enjoy the luxury of the villa. When she managed to go to the luxurious villa, she was once again nominated for the farm, this time by 33-year-old (T) hodhoris. This caused her to erupt:

*Fragment 3 (The Wall, ANT1, April 2003)*

1  
   \[ f: \] R: ΝΑΙ ΔΕΝ ΘΕΛΩ ΝΑ
   \[ ΠΑΩ ΔΙΠΛΑ .hhh ΝΑ \]
   \[ ΣΤΕΙ:ΔΕΙΣ hh ΤΙΣ \]
   \[ ΦΙΛΕΝΑ:ΔΕΣ ΣΟΥ \]
   \[ ΔΙΠΛΑ ΠΟΥ ΕΙ:ΝΑΙ \]
   \[ ΕΔΩ: ΕΝΑ \]
   \[ [ΜΗ:ΝΑ .hhh [Ο:ΧΙ=] \]
   \[ YES I DON’T WANT TO \]
   \[ GO NEXT DOOR .hhh \]
   \[ SE:ND hh YOUR \]
   \[ GI:RLFRIENDS \]
   \[ NEXT DOOR, THEY’VE BEEN \]
   \[ HE:RE FOR A \]
   \[ [ΜΟ:ΝΘ .hhh [ΝΟ:T=] \]

2  
   \[ m: \] T: \[ Γιατί δε- [Γιατί δεν=] \]
   \[ Why did- [Why didn’t=] \]

3  
   \[ R: \] =ΕΜΕ:ΝΑ .hh[ ΩΧΙ=] \]
   \[ =ΕΜΕ: .hh[ ΝΟΤ=]. \]

4  
   \[ T: \] =[το εί:πες; [Γιατί δεν=] \]
   \[ =[you say so? [Why didn’t= \]

5  
   \[ R: \] =ΕΜΕ:ΝΑ .hh ΛΙΓΟ τη= \]
   \[ =ΕΜΕ:hh A BIT of= \]

6  
   \[ T: \] =[το εί:πες; \]
   \[ =[you say so? \]

7  
   \[ R \]
   \[ =λογική: σού ρέ \]
   \[ =your common sense re ((interj.)) \]
   \[ γριά: γυναίκα ρέ \]
   \[ I’m an o:ld wo:man re ((interj.)) \]
   \[ να μην κάτσω να δω χαρά: \]
   \[ shouldn’t I stay here to have fu:n \]
   \[ [εγώ: [myse:lf \]

8  
   \[ T: \]
   \[ Άμα ήσουνα γριά \]
   \[ [If you were an o:ld \]
   \[ γυναίκα :hh να καθό:σουν \]
   \[ wo:man .hh you shou:ld have \]
   \[ σπιτάκι σου σε: \]
   \[ stay:ed ho:me gi:ve \]
πα[ρακαλώ: ( ) me [a br:ak ( )

9 R: ΕΔΩ ΕΙΜΑΙ γιατί έχω
τον ΛΟ:ΓΟ μου= [I AM HERE because I have
my REA:SON

In this strong argument between the two contestants the identity old woman is an important tool. Roula believes that as an old woman, she is entitled to remain in the villa whereas younger women—Thodhoris’s girlfriends who now become cross-members for Roula—should move to the farm, since they have been staying in the villa since the beginning of the show. Roula invokes the partitioning inconstancy of the two MCDs (stage of life and gender) as a vehicle for claiming her right to stay in the villa. Thodhoris, however, explicitly denies Roula’s membership in the category old woman: old women are supposed to stay at home and are not expected to take part in reality television games. The identity Roula tries to construct is rejected by the younger contestant.

In the fourth fragment, a woman invokes her membership in the category old person to complain about the fact that her entitlement to a specific right, that is, being offered a seat, is not acknowledged. Veteran actress Gheorghia (V)asiliadhou, who is 78, is talking to journalist Dhimitris Lymberopoulos, 45±, about her younger colleagues.

Fragment 4 (Αθώος ή Ενοχός/Innocent or Guilty, ERT, 1975)

1 f V: Τι να πεις για τα καινούρια τα παιδιά τώρα; (.) Ποι μπαίνω μέσα εγώ: (.) εγώ: (.) Τέλος πάντων την ηλικία μου όχι τη θέση μου, (.) δεν έχω καμιά θέση κι εγώ, (.) δουλεύω όπως δουλεύουν κι οι άλλοι: (.) hh Αλλά: (.) την ηλικία μου μπαίνω μέσα και δεν σηκώνεται κανείς να μου δώσει θέση. What can you say about young children now? (.) Now that I go in I: (.) I: (.) Anyway my a:ge, not my position, (.) I have no position myself either, (.) I work just like they do (.).hh But: (.) my a:ge I go in and no one stands up to offer me a seat.
Vasiliadhou invokes two MCDs, *stage of life* and *theatre* (as a sub-collection of the MCD work) that have partitioning inconstancy: although in terms of *theatre/work* she claims co-membership with young people in the category *employee* (όχι τη θέση μου... όπως δουλεύουν κι αυτοί:), she claims cross-membership in terms of *stage of life* and the category-bound expectation that an incumbent of the category *old person* should be offered a seat. The partitioning inconstancy of the two MCDs is being used as a vehicle for complaining about changing cultural norms: in the past it would be inconceivable for a younger person to remain seated when an older person would enter a room (or get on a bus) and there would be no available seat for them.

Whereas in the previous fragment Vasiliadhou denied the relevance of her status (θέση) for the complaint she was making concerning younger people’s behaviour, there are cases in which one’s professional status is a right that people claim by invoking their membership in the category *old or older person*. Thus, in fragment 5, a middle-aged person invokes membership in the category *old person* to strengthen his professional image and imply a higher status in professional hierarchy. The fragment is part of an argument between 52-year-old Papadhakis, the host of a morning news show, and 31-year-old Eleni Meneghaki, the hostess of the morning variety show that followed Papadhakis’s show on ANT1 channel. Meneghaki had complained on air the previous day that the beginning of her show was repeatedly delayed because Papadhakis’s show lasted more than the scheduled time –she was also rumoured to have complained about it to the directors of the channel. Papadhakis answered back on air, during his show.

*Fragment 5 (Καλημέρα Ελλάδα/Good Morning Greece, ANT1, 2002)*

1 m P: Παρακαλώ λοιπόν το
μάρκετινγκ και τη ροή του
προγράμματος να με
ενημερώνει... (0.3)
.h για το πώς θα
προγραμματίζω (.) α::: την::
(.) εκπομπή μου και τι θα
kάνω για το περιεχόμενό της.
(…) Θα συνεχίσω να κάνω μ’
aξιοπρέπεια (.) τη δουλειά:

So would the
marketing associates and the
technical directors please
inform me (.) in ti:me (0.3)
.h about how I will be
planning (.) u:::h my::
( . ) show and what I will be
doing about its content.
( . . ) I will keep doing with
di:gnity ( . ) my jo:ob
Although on other occasions Papadhakis would (either comically or not) tend to distance from the category old person, in this case, he endorses it to strengthen his professional image as a journalist with dignity and duration. Talking about γεράματα at his age is certainly an exaggeration but this exaggeration helps him emphasize the contrast between himself as an experienced, mature news journalist and Meneghaki as a younger presenter of a variety show, to boot, as his reference to the contents of his programme seems to imply. Thus, in comparing the two programmes and, consequently, their presenters (that is, himself and Meneghaki), Papadhakis invokes two MCDs, stage of life and work –or even celebrities– that present partitioning inconstancy (Sacks 1992b; Butler 2008), as they are manipulated by Papadhakis to entail cross-membership for the two presenters: whereas in terms of work Papadhakis and Meneghaki can be heard as co-members (they are employees of the same channel), Papadhakis is the older person and Meneghaki is the younger person. In addition, Papadakis’s reference to the content of his programme invokes another MCD: types of TV programmes within which Papadhakis is an incumbent of the category serious journalist and Meneghaki an incumbent of the category variety show presenter. Thus, the discrepancy in age is corroborated by the discrepancy in the type of TV programme they present and establishes the two people as completely different. 

To sum it up, Papadhakis uses the stage-of-life membership as a “cover/camouflage identity” (Schegloff 2007: 468) to claim his professional superiority.

The remaining fragments present cases of speakers exploiting the partitioning constancy of MCDs to strengthen their image. This is illustrated in fragment 6, in
which a veteran, and currently unemployed, actress, Beata (A)simakopoulou, 64, is asked by a female (J)ournalist, 30±, to confirm that she wants to return to acting.

Fragment 6 (Ιστορίες για αγρίοσς/Cock-and-bull Stories, ANT1, 1996)

1  f  J: Πάντως η δίψα για μία δουλειά (.) να πάρεις. Yet you do yearn for a job (.) don’t you.

2  f (.)

3  A: Τσ- .hh ναι (.) όταν (βέβαια) μεγάλωσα πια, (.) δεν μπορώ να πάω να κάνω: (.) μπεμπέ:κες. Tσ-.hh yes (.) since (of course) I have grown up, (.) I cannot go to play (.) silly little girls.

4  J: Δηλαδή; What do you mean?

5  →  A: Αυ; ήταν κάτι που να:: (.) με εκπροσωπού:σε, (0.6) έπαινη ηλικί:α μου, (1.0) στην ::: (.) στο ύφος μου, (0.8) στη θέ::ση θέ::ση θέ::ση θέ::ση μου, (0.4) θα το έκανα. If there were something that (.) would be appropriate, (0.6) for my age, (1.0) my style, (0.8) my status, (0.4) I would do it.

Asimakopoulou admits that she wants to return to acting but she mentions certain conditions that invoke three different MCDs: stage-of-life (στην ηλικί:α μου), acting-style (στο ύφος μου) and professional hierarchy (στη θέ::ση θέ::ση θέ::ση μου). All three have partitioning constancy in that they differentiate her from other members of her profession by making relevant the categories older woman vs. younger women, ‘serious’/dramatic actress vs. less ‘serious’ actress/comedians, recognized actress vs. novice actresses respectively. Reference to the stage-of-life MCD allows Asimakopoulou to assert a right to preferential treatment: so, in this case, too, membership in the category older woman functions as a cover identity (cf. Schegloff 2007) that allows Asimakopoulou to activate the relevance of the other MCDs and enjoy the category-bound rights that are associated with them.

In a similar way, another actress invokes two MCDs, stage of life and theatre to claim membership in a more prestigious category. Anna (K)alouta, 89, is interviewed by Anna (D)rouza, 35±. There is also a live (audience), mostly consisting of women (W1, W2, W3).
Partitioning constancy/inconstancy of Membership Categorization Devices

Fragment 7 (Μπορώ/I Can, NET, March 2007)

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<td>f</td>
<td>D:</td>
<td>Να σας πω τώρα που λέτε έτσι</td>
<td>Let me ask you something now</td>
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<td></td>
<td>μεγαλώνοντας,</td>
<td>you talk about getting older,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>μεγαλώνοντας, όλο</td>
<td>getting older, and again</td>
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<td>μεγαλώνοντας (ακούμε), .hh</td>
<td>getting older (we hear), .hh</td>
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<td></td>
<td>την ηλικία σας τη λέτε:</td>
<td>do you tell your age?</td>
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<td>&quot;ΟΙ α</td>
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<td>Ν0α</td>
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<td>W2:</td>
<td>[&quot;Α:: o</td>
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<td>f</td>
<td>K:</td>
<td>Τη λέω</td>
<td>I tell my age</td>
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<td>(0.5)</td>
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<td>W3:</td>
<td>&quot;Τη λέειμ</td>
<td>&quot;She tells her age</td>
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<td></td>
<td>D:</td>
<td>[Δεν έχετε κανένα [πρόβλημα</td>
<td>[You don’t [mind</td>
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<td></td>
<td>K:</td>
<td>[Λέω</td>
<td>[I tell</td>
<td>[I tell (.) my years</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>[Λέω την</td>
<td>in the theatre.</td>
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<td>ηλικία μου (.) στο θέατρο.</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>(.)</td>
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<td>D:</td>
<td>Προσέ- α:....</td>
<td>List- oh:....</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>K:</td>
<td>Πρόσεζε.</td>
<td>Listen.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D:</td>
<td>Γιατί κάποιες άλλες</td>
<td>Some other women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>αλλάζουνε και την</td>
<td>change their age on their</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ταυτότητα</td>
<td>id card: rds</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K:</td>
<td>[Ο- όχι α δεν μ’</td>
<td>[N- no oh I don’t</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>ενδιαφέρει δεν μ’ ενδιαφέρει</td>
<td>care I don’t care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.h ε κακώ- κακώς κάνουν</td>
<td>.h uh that- that’s wrong</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>αγάπη μου. .h Κοίταξε</td>
<td>sweetheart. .h Listen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>μανούλα μου .h εγώ δεν</td>
<td>honey .h I</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>μπορώ ν’ αλλάξω την: (.) τη:</td>
<td>can’t change my: (.) my:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.) την ηλικία μου .hh διότι</td>
<td>(.) my age .hh because</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>όταν λέω .h το γύλια</td>
<td>when I say .h in nineteen:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>εννιακός: σια τό:: so .hh έπαιξα</td>
<td>so: mething .hh I played</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>στο τά:δε θέατρο .hh και</td>
<td>in this or that theatre .hh and I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Apostolos Poulios

play:ed the role of the evzone for example. Anyone can figure out my age.

Yes.

What can be done? (.)

[That was in nineteen some-]

[Yes but (.) you say]

=thing and now we’re in nineteen- two

thou[and (whate[ver)]

you were born in the early twenties.

(1.7) ((AK jocularly seals her lips))

(1.7) ((AK jocularly seals her lips))

[heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh]

[heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh heh]

S’il [vous plait ma’am!]

[Your re- ((she probably wants to refer to Kalouta’s resume that was available on Wikipedia’s site at the time)]

[Your re- ((she probably wants to refer to Kalouta’s resume that was available on Wikipedia’s site at the time)]

What?

The truth is.

Why don’t you say what year you were born in?

The truth is

You are

[I’VE BEEN]

[phenome|non]

[ON STAGE FOR]
Kalouta’s repeated use of the verb μεγαλώνω/‘to get older’ prompts Drouza to directly ask her if she tells her age. Kalouta’s gaps (turns 3, 6), which are signs of an upcoming dispreferred action (Pomerantz 1984), are indicative of the fact that her response is not going to be the expected one: although she says that she does tell her age (6), after a further gap she says that what she reveals is the number of years she has been active as an actress. Thus, instead of invoking the MCD stage of life Kalouta states that she prefers to invoke the MCD theatre. Within the former collection she would be a member of the category old woman; in the latter, however, she can claim membership in the category old actress that has different implications, as it is bound to attributes such as being experienced, respectable and popular. Although, the two MCDs present partitioning constancy (she is co-classed on the same side of the partitioned population), they are associated with different attributes (cf. Sacks 1992b, Butler 2008): her age implies a co-membership with other incumbents of the category old person that are probably associated with negative attributes, but her job with the category old actresses/actors, especially those who have enjoyed a long successful career and are still dearly loved by the public.

The final fragment comes again from The Wall (see fragment 3 above) and presents a male player whose age categorization was frequently discussed during the show. Michalis, 63, often claimed to be or asked to be treated as an equal to younger players. However, in the Private Room, where contestants enter to talk to an interviewer, he prefers to align with the category older person and its positive attributes. The female (I)nterviewer (obviously younger than Michalis, as she uses the second person plural which expresses respect for the addressee, plus her youthful voice) asks him if he wants to beat any player in particular.
Fragment 8 (The Wall, ANT1, April 2003)

1  f  I: Έχετε προτίμηση θα θέλατε να νικήσετε κάποιον;  Do you have a preference as to whom you would like to beat?

2  m  M: Ναι.  Yes.

3  (0.8)  (0.8)

4  I: Ποιον;  Whom;

5  (0.5)  (0.5)

6  M: Τον Μάριο. (...) Διότι μου: Marios. (...) Because he

   συμπεριφέρθηκε:: beha::ved to me::

   τουλάχιστον πεντάκις at least five times

   ειρωνικά:, (.). h k i ενώ ironically, (.). h and while

   αυτός είναι τρίαντα εφτά: he is thirty se:ven

   κι εγώ εξήντα τρία: .h and I am si::nty three: .h

   προσπάθησε κατ’ he tried time after

   επανάληψη και ειδικά την time and especially on

   Παρασκευή όταν ήμασταν Friday when we were

   κάτω στο Ένα at Ena production

   Προντά:ξιον (.) να με ((studio)) (.) to

   συμβουλεύει και να μου advise me and

   κάνει υποδείξεις που: (.) give me instructions whi:ch (.)

   για μένα δεν ήταν for me were not

   κόσμιες. (...) Διότι:: proper. (.). Becau::se I

   και μεγαλύτερη μόρφωση have both better education

   εκα από αυτών, (.). h και than him, (.). h and

   μεγαλύτερη γνώση, (0.3) more knowledge, (0.3)

   και για να μάθει αυτός να and it will take him

   μιλάει δέκα γλώσσες two lifetimes to learn

   απτάιστος θα χρειαστούνε to speak ten languages

   δύο ζωές. fluently.

Michalis’s chronological age is important to him. He implies that there are certain privileges that are bound to his membership in the category older person of the MCD stage of life: he cannot accept advice or instructions by a younger player. Marios has
insulted him several times by violating these category-bound, age-appropriate norms. Moreover, Michalis invokes the MCD *education* to express disapproval of the younger man’s patronizing behaviour and display his superiority. Both MCDs present partitioning constancy and allow Michalis to construct a more prestigious image.

4. Concluding Remarks
The paper presented cases in which middle-aged or older speakers exploited the partitioning constancy or inconstancy of various MCDs to either distance themselves from the category *old/older person* or align with it. The analysis showed that the partitioning pattern of MCDs is important for speakers as it offers them alternative categorizations that allow them to re-categorize themselves (Konzett 2012) in a more favourable light when a first categorization entails specific interactional risks or endangers their image. Partitioning constancy or inconstancy is also important because it allows speakers to emphasize co-membership or cross-membership with other speakers—and this differentiation in membership patterns allows the speakers to claim specific rights or attributes that are associated with their age identity and display affiliation (or lack thereof) with other members.

Acknowledgment
I am grateful to Professor Marianthi Makri-Tsilipakou for her insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

References


Appendix: Transcript Conventions

[ ] Brackets indicate the onset of overlapping talk.

( . ) A dot in parentheses indicates untimed silence.

( 0.6 ) Silence timed in tenths of a second.

↑ word Arrows indicate marked shifts into higher pitch in the word following the arrow.

( ( ) ) Double parentheses enclose analyst’s comments/descriptions.

( word ) Parenthesized words are especially dubious hearings.

= The equals sign indicates continuous utterances with no break or pause.

word Underlining indicates some form of stress or emphasis.

WORD Upper case indicates especially loud sounds.

° word ° Words bracketed by degree signs are relatively quieter than surrounding talk.

wo:::rd Colons indicate prolongation of the immediately preceding sound.

word, A comma indicates “continuing” intonation, not necessarily a clause boundary.

word The absence of an utterance-final marker indicates some sort of “indeterminate” contour.

> < “More than” and “less than” signs indicate that the talk they encompass was produced noticeably quicker than the surrounding talk.

.hhh A dot-prefixed row of hs indicates an inbreath.

(hh) hs within parentheses indicate audible aspirations.

heh heh Laughter.

xxXXXxx Lower- and uppercase Xs mark quite and loud applause respectively.

1, 2, 3 Numbers mark turns.

(f) (m) The letters f(emale) and m(ale) identify the speaker by sex.