Neutral Ground and Naming: The Implications of Tar Sands and Oil Sands for Environmental Debates in Alberta

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Abstract

Lexical choices reflect stances of evaluation and position speakers in relation to each other. With highly controversial issues however, speakers' terms can index polarized positions, leaving little room for those who wish to indicate a more neutral stance. This paper explores how speakers name the controversial Athabasca tar/oil sands during public debates. Two roundtable discussions were recorded in Alberta in 2010, and the panelists completed a short questionnaire about their practices and attitudes regarding the terms tar sands and oil sands. An analysis of naming practices, drawing on stance theory and a critical approach to discourse, shows that these terms can be problematic for speakers. Participants employ various strategies to direct the interpretation of the speaker's stance and to avoid positioning on either side of the controversy. These findings contribute to stance-taking in highly contested political contexts while also having practical implications for naming practices of the tar/oil sands in Alberta.

Key words: stance, naming practices, Alberta, environmental discourse, controversial debates, mining, critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Lexical choices reflect speaker evaluation (Du Bois 2007), however, when the referred object is controversial, stances of opposition can result in polarized lexical terms (e.g. Carbaugh 2006). Such is the case of the Athabasca tar sands or oil sands, an exceptionally contested mining area located in Northern Alberta, Canada. Due to highly invested economic, political, environmental, and social interests, the oil/tar sands have become controversial both in Alberta and internationally (e.g. Goldenberg 2011), and the terms used to describe them reflect certain, often dichotomous, sociocultural perspectives (Cosh 2012; Davidson and Gismondi 2011; Nikiforuk 2008; Rowland 2011). Although such naming practices have been gaining newsworthy status (e.g. Cosh 2012), there has been no study of the implications of their use in interaction. Drawing upon theories of stance and critical discourse analysis, I examine how speakers employ the terms to politically and ethically position themselves and others when discussing Alberta's energy development. As a critical ecolinguistic scholar, I also consider how these terms may help or hinder environmental activism in Alberta.

1.1 Tar/Oil Sands in Alberta

The tar/oilsands deposit is located just north of Fort McMurray in the Wood Buffalo region of northern Alberta. Buried within layers of sand beneath the boreal forest is a crude oil-like substance, which must be heated or diluted for transport due to its high viscosity. Known as bitumen, this substance is mined and exported as crude oil or upgraded into fuel and petroleum products. Originally used by Indigenous people to patch canoes, the bitumen-rich sands were first introduced to white settlers in the early 1700s. Development of the tar/oil sands began in the 1920s and, by the 1970s, bitumen was being extracted and processed on a massive scale (Humphries 2008). Today, two common extraction processes are used to recover bitumen: open-pit mining (truck and shovel) and in-situ Steam Assisted Gravity Drainage (SAGD). SAGD involves a horizontally drilled dual pipe system which melts the bitumen into a more viscous state, where it is then carried to the surface. Both methods bring with them questionable environmental practices and impacts, including large tailings reservoirs, expanding pipeline systems, and increasing CO2 emissions.

Situated south of the largest bitumen deposit, the city of Fort McMurray is the epicentre of tar/oil sands development. Considered a 'boom town', Fort McMurray is characterized in part by massive growth, a highly mobile and transient population, and the resulting infrastructure issues (Dorow and O'Shaughnessy 2013). Residents tend to identify strongly with the resource and the landscape of northern Alberta, and the region has been the subject of a number of social science research projects (e.g. Davidson and Gismondi 2011; Dorow and O'Shaughnessy 2013; Taylor, McGray and Watt-Malcolm 2007).

Fort McMurray and the tar/oil sands deposit are also located in Treaty 8 territory, which encompasses a number of Indigenous Dene (Chipewyan) and Cree communities. Development in the area has raised concerns about impacts on the traditional ways of life guaranteed to Indigenous people under Treaty 8. Most publicized is the issue of toxins borne by the Athabasca river downstream to the hamlet of Fort Chipewyan, where residents are reporting high levels of illness, and harvesting fish with unsettling deformities (Kelly et al. 2009; Timoney and Lee 2009).

Despite these issues, the tar/oil sands are strongly supported by the government of Alberta, largely because they are responsible for Alberta's economic growth. As further development brings larger impacts, the tar/oil sands have become increasingly controversial both within Canada and internationally, with high profile individuals coming out on either side of the debate (e.g. Babad 2013).

The terms used to describe the mines have come to reflect the often dichotic stances people take towards them. Historically, the resource was known as tar sands, due to its apparent similarity to tar, however it was later renamed oil sands, with government and industry actors insisting on this term ever since (Katz-Rosene 2012). Both terms are currently in use, however they have each become associated with two competing positions on the development of the resource: oil with a pro-development position, and tar with an anti-development position (Cosh 2012). On both sides of the debate, speakers claim their term is most accurate (e.g. Nikiforuk 2008; Uechi 2013), with proponents of the term oil sands claiming it to be the most 'neutral' (Rowland 2011).

2. Literature Review

The Athabasca tar/oil sands have been the focus of an increasing body of social science research. Studies have examined gendered experiences in resource dependent communities (O'Shaughnessy and Krogman 2011) and the general masculine constructions of the oil industry (Miller 2004). The dominant narratives of nature as resource and environmental destruction as necessary for prosperity, as well as possible alternative narratives surrounding the tar/oil sands, have also been explored through provincial literature (Gordon 2012). Much research has engaged with the Albertan regional identity, which appears to draw upon a history of resource development in the province (Evans and Garvin 2009; Haluza-Delay 2012; Kidner 2015; Svidal 2006). Support for oil and gas is cast as a provincial identity narrative, where 'Homo alberticus becomes homo energeticus' (Haluza-Delay 2012: 2). Even in grade school, children are exposed to such narratives as the curriculum 'focuses upon Alberta's resource abundance without word of environmental consequences' (Haluza-Delay 2012: 3). An examination of mining company discourse shows that industry actors are very aware of their language use and have begun adapting opposition voices to serve their interests (Kidner 2015). More specifically, research has suggested oil and gas development is constructed as a story of human ingenuity overcoming nature's challenge and opening the northern frontier (Davidson and Gismondi 2011: 42). Here, the tar/oil sands are the lifeblood of Alberta, never to be slowed (Davidson and Gismondi 2011: 70) and, as a result, any contesting voices are considered 'contrary to the interests of the Alberta people themselves' (Haluza-Delay 2012: 4). Residents therefore face difficult subject positionings when they seek to criticize development (Evans and Garvin 2009; Kidner 2015) and are constructed as treasonous outsiders and 'false heroes' who will kill the economy in their plight to save the environment (Davidson and Gismondi 2011: 88, 24).

However, missing from these important discussions is an examination of the words tar and oil sands themselves. Uncritical naming practices in and outside of academia mean that many people tend to use the term oil sands, thus reinforcing dominant discursive frames which favour development (Baker 2010). While remaining reflexive in our own use of terms as researchers, it is important to consider the ways in which locals use these terms in interaction, especially in contexts where a variety of contrasting positions must be negotiated. In this paper I examine debate situations where social actors display and argue for and against different perspectives on tar/oil sands development. In doing so, I analyze how these lexical choices allow speakers to signal their stance towards the mines and (dis)align with each other. I also consider the implications these terms have for those critical of tar/oil sands development.

3. Theoretical Approaches

Normal text In my analysis, I consider the terms tar or oil sands as contextualization cues which indicate stance (Gumperz 1982; Jaffe 2009). Stance is defined as a public, dialogic act of positioning and evaluation (Du Bois 2007: 163, 173) which assigns value to objects while positioning individuals in relationship to each other (Du Bois 2007: 139). Because 'no stance stands alone'

(Du Bois 2007: 158), analysts must examine the intertextual context of different stances taken during interaction as well as the wider sociocultural meanings that are indexed (Du Bois 2007).

In Alberta, the terms tar sands and oil sands work as triggers to 'invoke frames and scenarios within which the current utterance is to be interpreted as an interactional move' (Levinson 2003: 33) and can lead to competing discursive frames. In his examination of a similarly contested situation in Greylock Glen, Carbaugh found that interlocutors use different lexical terms to contextually position themselves in relation to development in the area (2006). Through the choice of either 'the mountain' or 'the project', different 'meanings are created in two directions' both invoking 'a system of meanings which are associated with the selected item' while simultaneously contrasting 'between the selected item and the others which were not chosen' (Carbaugh 2006: 139). When discussing controversial and polarizing situations, it becomes almost impossible to present a stance of neutrality (see Jaffe 2009: 3). In such cases, speakers may make use of indeterminancy, whereby they exploit the possibility of a variety of stances to avoid taking a side (Jaffe 2009: 18).

Drawing upon these ideas, this paper examines how speakers in Alberta use tar and oil sands to politically and ethically position themselves and others in discussions of Alberta's energy development. In doing so, I address the following questions: How do speakers navigate the tar/oil sands choice of term and how does this choice position themselves and their interlocutors? More widely, what does this mean for oil/tar sands discourse in Alberta?

Because of the political nature of the tar/oil sands discussion in Alberta, it is also necessary to consider the role of powerful and oppressive social structures and how they influence and reflect stancetaking (Jaffe 2009). Sometimes, indexical relationships can become established through political and ideological processes, where certain stances can have 'a direct, even iconic connection to social identities' (Jaffe 2009: 13) and help naturalize ideologies, causing them to be presupposed and therefore unquestioned. This means we should take into account the sociopolitical context in order to analyze how people have access to certain stances (such as those related to authority) as well as the stances that are attributed to them (Jaffe 2009: 20). I therefore approach discourse from a critical perspective, considering my analysis in the ways that power relations are enacted, negotiated, or resisted through talk (Blommaert 2005; Wodak and Fairclough 2010). In the present case, power becomes highlighted in interactions - between industry representatives and University scientists, between the public and government officials, between students and Indigenous representatives – in subtle and complex ways. Power relations are also evident in access to 'valued social resources' as well as access to discourse and/or communicative events (Van Dijk 1996: 90, 85–86). This becomes relevant for example in the planning stage (e.g. who is invited to speak?), but also in the power to control talk itself in the form of which mode, which language or dialect, which genre, etc. (Van Dijk 1996: 88). Additionally, multimodal aspects of interaction (e.g. room layout, seating plan) can be indicative of power relations (Machin 2013; Van Leeuwen 2004), influencing the stances available to different individuals.

4. Data Collection and Method

The data for this paper consist of two recorded panel discussions held in Edmonton and Fort McMurray in 2010. The panelists were made up of representatives from Indigenous, environmental, scientific, and government groups, and the audience consisted of University students and members of the public. The Edmonton discussion was organized by a local environmental society and was presented as a debate about the environmental impacts of development on the Athabasca river basin. The Fort McMurray discussion was part of a University-led visit to the area (which I helped organize), meant to give an overview of differing perspectives. In both cases, panelists were invited to present their positions by a moderator, after which the floor was opened for questions and discussion.

For each event, I placed recorders near the front of the room and also took notes as a member of the audience, but refrained from participating in the question and answer portion. The discussions were then transcribed and each occurrence of the use of tar sands and oil sands was noted for deeper analysis, as well as instances where it appeared that the speaker was struggling with terminology. I then examined each instance for contextualization cues (Gumperz 1992) to understand how speakers seem to be positioning themselves and others through stance (e.g. Du Bois 2007; Harré and Langenhove 1991). I also consider the wider contexts previously outlined in regards to Albertan identities (Haluza-Delay 2012), as well as the power differences of speakers in the room (Blommaert 2005: 200; Wodak and Fairclough 2010).

After each panel discussion I distributed a questionnaire to the panelists with a self-addressed envelope (see Appendix). The questionnaire elicited opinions and attitudes about the use of the word tar sands and oil sands (see Table 1). Despite the low rate of questionnaire return (2 out of 6), it is apparent that the perspectives given tend to align with popular Discourses about the terms and attitudes surrounding them (see Cosh 2012; Rowland 2011); namely, tar sands is associated with a critical stance towards development and oil sands with a supportive stance.

Question	Tar sands	Oil sands
Which term do you prefer and why?	Tar sands because it depicts the 'sands' in a way that I would like people to think about them. The choice is political	Oil comes from the ore as a finished product. It makes no sense to use the term tar because the ore doesn't produce tar as a primary or finished product 'Tar sands' is technically not accurate. If I am speaking with a technical person and they use the word 'tar' I immediately judge them as a sciolist, they should know better and among experts there should be an ethic of accuracy. If however I am speaking to a layperson I do

		not care at all which term they use, most of the public is informed by the media and will adopt whatever word they hear
What characteristics do you associate with people who use this term?	Anti-oil sands advocates, environmentalists	
	If the person is speaking as a technical expert, I know them to have a poor understanding of the meaning of tar	Industry people, and those who are open minded to the pros and cons of oil sands development
	Critics of development, politicized around these issues	None – use of this word carries no positive or negative connotation
	Industry people, and those who are open minded to the pros and cons of oil sands development	Supporters of development or unsure of their position
Which of these terms (if any) is neutral?	Tar sands was, but media are using oil sands so much that I now have to think to say tar sands	Oil sands is more neutral, because 'tar sands' was reactionary. Historically, 'oil sands' was used to talk about the oil sands industry
		Oil sand, I suppose one could use bitumen sand or bitumen ore (reflecting that it is not just sand) but these are admittedly awkward

Table 1. Questionnaire Results

As is evidenced in the above responses, tar sands is considered a 'political' choice which may reference a lack of understanding, anti-development advocacy, and environmentalism. On the other hand, oil sands denotes accuracy, neutrality, industry, and support for development. There is also a sense that these terms themselves frame the debate ('it depicts the 'sands' in a way that I would like people to think about them'). Additionally, respondents focus on oil sand's perceived accuracy and neutrality, drawing upon scientific discourses ('oil comes from the ore as a finished product', 'the ore doesn't produce tar as a primary or finished product', "tar sands' is technically not accurate') and ideas of its historical use ('historically 'oil sands' was used to talk about the oil sands industry', "tar sands' was reactionary').

The normalization of terms through current media discourses is also reflected ('media are using oil sands so much that I now have to think to say tar sands'). It is useful to keep these responses in mind as we move into the analysis of talk in interaction.

5. Analysis

As evidenced from the questionnaire responses discussed in the last section, the terms oil sands and tar sands tend to represent divergent stances. Table 2 summarizes these terms and their associated stereotypes and associations.

Tar Sands	Oil Sands
Associated with: negative attitudes towards development, environmentalism, lack of scientific understanding, overtly political	Associated with: accuracy, neutrality, scientific rationality

Table 2. Term Associations Summary

The debate set in Edmonton took place in a University lecture room with an audience of both students and members of the public (about 200 strong). Positioned at the front of the room are Jim[1] (a water scientist), Bill (a government representative), and Josh (a political science professor who is chairing the session). Similarly, the panel discussion set in Fort McMurray involved Alana (an Indigenous campaigner with a large environmental organization), Michael (an industry representative), and Julia (an Indigenous elder). The event took place in a small conference room and the audience consisted of about 30 students from the University who had been visiting Fort McMurray to hear different perspectives about development in the region.

First, both the layout of the room and the schedule of the event construct relationships between the participants. For example, having the panelists seated at the front and facing the audience suggests they are 'experts' on the topic being debated. Additionally, they are each given an allotted time to speak, while the audience should sit quietly and listen (cf. Van Dijk 1996). However, due to the particularly controversial nature of the topic, this layout and speaking schedule may be also interpreted as a cross-examination style interaction, with the panelists presented as having to answer to the audience. In this way, audience members themselves may be constructed both as seeking information from experts and also as questioning those they believe are telling diverging truths. In this way, certain stances are multimodally suggested (such as those individuals placed on the panel being designated epistemic authority), however the positions that are available to each participant are negotiable and dynamic. Contextualization cues such as tar sands and oil sands then become useful resources which allow speakers to suggest certain interpretations of their utterances and (dis)align with other actors.

5.1 Oil Sands and Tar Sands as Norms

During the presentation portion of both events, oil sands seems to be the preferred term. This is perhaps not surprising, as oil sands tends to be used most in public discourse, as well as by the Alberta government (Katz-Rosene 2012). In the examples below, Bill (Edmonton debate) and Michael (Fort McMurray debate) both use oil sands when describing the work they do on behalf of government and industry respectively:

Excerpt 1

1	Bill	WE'VE been doing a lot of work in the oil sands uh with respect with
2		trying to + uh piece out + uh contaminants and and + where they go
3		and how to get there

Excerpt 2

1	Mike	so that's + that's you know i + i'm really proud of that cus that's
2		you know +that's nearly unprecedented in + the history of oil sands
3		development + so that's uh + that's ONE really big thing that uh +
4		you know is really gonna change + uh + the environmental impacts
5		that oil sands + has on the Environment

Both speakers describe their work in positive terms (we've been doing a lot of work in the oil sands, 1; that's nearly unprecedented in the history of oil sands development, 2), and use the corresponding pro-development term oil sands.

On the other hand, Alana (an Indigenous woman representing an environmental organization in Fort McMurray) tends to predominantly use tar sands, as in the following example:

Excerpt 3

1	Alana	um + lubicon cree that's + where i come from + there's over two
2		thousand conventional oil wells + so we have conventional oil +
3		we have logging + we have gas and now we have tar sands +
4		tar sands have been in the area since nineteen seventy six

Alana describes the negative impacts that her community has suffered due to development (over two thousand conventional oil wells, we have logging, we have gas, and now we have tar sands, 1-3). As a representative of a large environmental organization in Alberta, Alana is also aligned in opposition to tar/oil sands development (which references an explicit campaign), and her use of tar sands highlights her negative stance.

5.2 Term Alternation

In some cases, however, speakers alternate terms during their presentations. For example, both Jim and Alana switch to oil sands, even when presenting a perspective that criticizes the pace and scope of development:

Excerpt 4

1	Jim	MY: uh + take on the OIL sands + is that i don't really + pick on any
2		ONE +issues (1) i think that it would be comparable to normal uh +
3		uh + IMPACTS if you + took any one or two of these then +
4		the sum total of that would + to me makes it a + guinness +

5		book of records of black star development

Excerpt 5

1	Alana	there's a lot of water issues um + and industry actually takes
2		precedence over protecting the fisheries + um + the license oil sands +
3		like + the ability for the oil sands to withdraw the o- + er the operators
4		is + equivalent to right now + the city of three million + so they take a
5		lot of water every single day

Here, both Jim and Alana highlight the environmental damage of the development but do not use the corresponding anti-development term. In Jim's case, this could be due to the fact that none of the presenters in the Edmonton debate have yet used tar sands (see Du Bois 2009 regarding dialogic stance-taking), and he is accommodating to the preferred term of previous speakers (although he does switch later in the discussion). Alana, who has consistently used tar sands for the duration of her speech, switches here, despite critiquing the water use of companies operating along the river. In this case, she may be using oil sands to intertextually present the government voice by referencing their pro-development stance (Fairclough 2003), or to index a position of accuracy and authority (see the questionnaire responses).

Due in part to the Alberta government's insistence that oil sands is a neutral term (Cosh 2012), the use of tar sands in public debates might appear more marked. For example, during the discussion portion of the Edmonton event, one of the public participants introduces the term tar sands in a question addressed to the panel. Thomas, a middle-aged, white, independent scientist who has published research on river contamination downstream of development, challenges Bill about his position on independent research results in the Athabasca River.

Excerpt 6

1	Thomas	uh + doctor bill + uh, my name is thomas and i'm the secondary
2		author of the grant + uh grant and johnson paper that you criticized
3		and i wasn't aware + actually of your criticism + before so +
4		before today so i'd like to talk to you about that (1)
5	Bill	okay +
6	Thomas	LATER + uh //but my question is\
7	Audience	/<laughter>\\
8	Thomas	//my question is this + um + if uh +\
9	Audience	/<laughter>\\
10	Thomas	if uh + doctor jim does credible science + um + and if the u:h +
11		the that +science of the uh + eluded to today in this presentation is

12		USE^ful + in it's + adding to the um + understanding of + toxins in
13		the in + the tar sands + WHY + isn't that work being funded +
14		and done + by government or industry uh + paid for + uh +
15		credible science? + um + or are you saying + from the stuff you're
16		gonna be releasing soon+ it IS being done + and it confirms with what doctor jim has come up with +
17		gonna be releasing soon+ it IS
18	Bill	ah well i + i would favour your latter + your latter uh + lead answer
19		which is, that it IS being done...(continued)

Thomas begins his question by positioning himself very directly: in lines 1-2, he states his name and discloses his identity as the secondary author of the paper that Bill criticized earlier in the debate. After declaring that he wishes to discuss the criticisms, Thomas waits for Bill to agree before saying this will be discussed later (6). Thomas thus uses humour to challenge Bill's authority (see Holmes 2000) and the ensuing laughter (7) shows that the audience has recognized this.

Additionally, by revealing his identity as the author of an academic paper on the subject of oil/tarsands development, Thomas positions himself as an expert. This gives him the authority to criticize Bill as an equal, despite the fact that Thomas is relegated to the audience while Bill is on the expert panel.

Thomas then continues with his question and uses the first instance of tar sands (13), which indicates he is adopting a stance critical of development. Still, he hesitates with a self-correction and a small pause (the in, the, 13), perhaps in understanding that he risks being seen as radical, uninformed, and anti-development (see Table 1). However, these associations are managed through his earlier discursive work in which he has already constructed himself as an expert on the subject (1-2) and adopted a stance of authority. In this way, Thomas uses tar sands to guide the interpretation of his question as critical of development and manages the negative perceptions of himself indexed by the term.

Thomas is the first audience member to ask questions and his use of tar sands is echoed in the answer to his question. After Bill provides an answer about funding independent research (18-19), the other panelist, Jim, gives his own response:

Excerpt 7

1	Jim	the reason we + we didn't + get any other funding is we didn't ASK
2		him for any uh + Bill (2) we we wanted to maintain our
3		independence + for this study uh + we considered asking the
4		national science and engineering RESEARCH council but the only:
5		branch that has the uh +the uh + the necessary MONEY would uh +
6		ask us to + to uh apply to industry for part of the MONEY and + get
7		letters of endorsement //from all the tar sands mines\

8	Audience	/<laughter>\\

He begins by explaining that the reason he did not apply for funding was that he wished to maintain his scientific independence (we wanted to maintain our independence for this study, 2-3). Additionally, available funding sources would require endorsement from all the tar sands mines (7). Here, Jim uses tar sands, highlighting his critical perspective and further underlining his exasperation with needing endorsement from the very companies he wishes to criticize. The overlapping audience laughter suggests that this situation is indeed perceived as ridiculous.

Anne, who seems to struggle with the choice of terms, asks the next question. A young, white, University educated woman, Anne asks her question about the balance between approving projects and measuring impacts.

Excerpt 8

1	Anne	um + i was (unintelligible) + i + been watching oil sands + industry
2		for + (unintelligible) + six years and i've had many questions and i've
3		been involved as an activist with +greenpeace and (unintelligible) +
4		and my continual question that i have for alberta environment and
5		(unintelligible) involved in + the tar sands development community
6		is + if the science is so inconclusive and there are so many different
7		perspectives + how can we continue to go ahead with further
8		development and further approvals until we know + if +
9		further development CAN be supported by + the ecosystem that we are
10		impacting?

Anne begins her turn with a preamble which serves to position her before asking her question to the panel. To start, she uses oil sands (i been watching oil sands 1), however she then pauses briefly and says industry. Although she may simply be using oil sands here as an adjective, there is another possible interpretation. Because her use of oil sands may position her as favourable of development, Anne may use the word industry as a more neutral replacement term. In the context of the debate, industry is still easily understood as referring to the oil/tarsands, and using it would allow her to draw on its indeterminancy, and to avoid taking a strong position for either perspective before she has finished her question (Jaffe 2009: 18). Anne also builds up her epistemic authority through her experience: she has been observing the industry for six years and, in that time, she's had many questions (1-2). In this way, Anne draws upon the indexical power of oil sands, coupled with the time she has spent watching the developments, to position herself as someone who should be taken seriously in the context of the debate.

In the next utterance, Anne begins to make her critical points. First, she identifies herself as an activist with Greenpeace (3), a well-known local environmental organization that holds as its mandate to 'stop the tarsands'. By

positioning herself so strongly with a critical institution such as Greenpeace, Anne aligns herself also with Jim, who has previously been critical of development, as well as other members of Greenpeace who are also in the audience. At the same time, this positions her in opposition to those on the panel who are pro-development, namely Bill, the government scientist. She indicates that her question will be directed both to the Alberta government and to the tar sands development community (5). Her hesitation before tar sands suggests Anne may in fact be struggling with the choice of terms, but her use of tar sands further aligns her with previous questioners (namely Thomas) and others who hold a stance critical of development. In this preamble, Anne slowly builds up her authority to indicate her stance in opposition to the oil/tarsands and it is from this contextual perspective that she asks her question. The rest of her utterance aligns with her positioning as an environmentalist as she criticizes the pace of development (how can we continue to go ahead with further development and further approvals, 6-10).

Taken together, Anne's question contains a great deal of information about her views but also about the power relationships amongst participants in the discussion. Anne's possible self-correction of oil sands, as well as the numerous pauses throughout the beginning of her utterance (lines 1-3), suggest she may be unsure of what to say (see Gumperz 1982). Like Thomas, she spends time establishing her epistemic authority through her experience and by aligning with a local institution (i been watching oil sands industry, i've been involved as an activist, 1,3) before using the word tar sands. However, unlike Thomas, Anne is a young woman with no independent research background, facing the panel of male experts. She therefore uses a variety of linguistic resources, including the terms oil sands and tar sands, in order to legitimize her voice while still questioning the actions of the very powerful social actors represented on the panel. How and when she indicates her stance as critical of development in the oil/tarsands is a delicate act.

In his response to Anne's question, Jim also uses both tar sands and oil sands.

Excerpt 9

1	Jim	i think the SIMPLE answer is + that uh + the government keeps
2		saying +we're going to go + uh + uh full steam ahead with the oil sands
3		development + people vote them in + and then they take that as a
4		mandate + to do just that + i doubt whether uh + uh + even their own
5		environmental people wants to put MUCH of a break on there i've
6		known several successive ministers and + you know + the uh minis +
7		minister of ENVIRONMENT is a relatively weak member of cabinet +
8		compared to the people who push for energy and uh + finance who's
9		(unintelligible) + seem to be holding up all this + valuable energy we'll
10		be getting and all this money coming in and + the public just sort of
11		looks the other way +after all it's up there uh + PROBABLY three
12		quarters of the people in this room have never really SEEN

13	the tar sands

He begins by providing what he terms a simple answer (1): that the government has uncritically encouraged development. In his answer, Jim uses the phrase oil sands development, a term which indexes support for the mines. This may be interpreted as an indirect quotation, intertextually presenting the government's voice and stance on the matter (Fairclough 2003) and making clear that this is not Jim's own opinion. In this way, Jim seems to position the government on the pro-development side of the debate (full steam ahead with the oil sands development, 2-3), which helps to set up the rest of his argument in opposition to the government's stance. In line 7, Jim characterizes the environment minister as a relatively weak member of cabinet and argues that, because of the financial and energy perks, most of the public ignores criticisms of development. In line 11 he says after all it's up there, locating the oil/tarsands geographically as outside of the city. This spatial work 'has cultural consequences: the spatial locating operates as cultural synecdoche' and the location becomes symbolic of a host of cultural values and meanings (Carbaugh 2006: 131). Thus, by using up there Jim locates the oil/tarsands as far away and possibly outside of urban concern. This geographical positioning of a place invites one 'into a space from which to view it', where 'certain ways of thinking, acting, and feeling are evoked' (Carbaugh 2006: 131). In this way, Jim locates his urban interlocutors as unable to view the sites for themselves, making the tar/oil sands out of reach for the majority of city-dwellers. This isolation is further emphasized in lines 11-13: probably three quarters of the people in this room have never really seen the tar sands. Here, Jim switches to tar sands, eliciting a critical frame and an anti-development stance. In other words, he seems to suggest that seeing the actual projects will highlight their negative aspects and counteract the government's pro-development, oil sands message (lines 1-3). Unlike Anne, Jim does not hesitate when using these terms, perhaps because he has less need to legitimize his position. As an expert who holds power in the room, Jim can afford to be critical and use the word tar sands while still retaining authority. By positioning himself in opposition to the tar/oil sands, he simultaneously disaligns with the government and any other interlocutors who may be supportive of development, including Bill.

6. Discussion

The speakers recorded in these debates tend to follow the contextual norms of naming the tar/oil sands: those espousing a pro-development stance use oil sands while those who wish to criticize development use tar sands. However, in some cases, speakers may use oil sands when presenting a negative view and some speakers alternate their use of the terms, even within a single turn of talk (e.g. Excerpt 9). However, the use of tar sands in resistance to wider, more powerful pro-development Discourses, such as those tied to the Albertan identity (see Haluza-Delay 2012; Kowalsky and Haluza-DeLay 2013), may require careful discursive positioning. Both Thomas and Anne legitimize their epistemic authority before using tar sands: Thomas constructs himself as a researcher and Anne aligns with an environmental institution (see Du Bois

2007). This contrasts with the way Jim uses the term, as he is already positioned as a scientific expert by way of the room layout and event schedule.

More generally, the only speakers to switch terms during the debates are those who position themselves critically in opposition to tar/oil sands development. Both government and industry representatives consistently use oil sands while environmentalists, researchers, and members of the public alternate between one and the other. This practice of changing terms within a single utterance (e.g. Excerpt 8, 9) may be interpreted as a useful linguistic strategy to negotiate conflicting positions. In fact, considering the powerful prevalence of the pro-development stance in Alberta, alternating terms may be a necessary linguistic strategy which helps speakers to develop stance over time (Jaffe 2009: 18). By carefully indicating their position, speakers can negotiate the risks of being associated with negative stereotypes surrounding the use of tar sands (see questionnaire responses), and develop their epistemic authority, which helps them to legitimize their critique.

Much like Carbaugh's study of Greylock Glen (2006), the use of either tar sands or oil sands seems to activate meanings in different and opposing directions: either anti- or pro-development. These stances can then trigger a set of scripts for predicted positions and behaviours: from symbolic identities (e.g. 'environmentalist'), to symbolized actions (e.g. voting styles), to the symbolic 'construction of relationships between the two positions, persona, and their actions' (Carbaugh 2006: 136). In this way, a stance that (dis)aligns dramatically with others in a controversial debate, draws upon the wider sociocultural discourses associated with it: using tar sands has major implications for how an actor is perceived precisely because it brings so many other identities and assumptions into the room. Additionally, by choosing one term, the speaker creates 'symbolic contrasts between the selected item and the others which were not chosen' (Carbaugh 2006: 139). In other words, as much meaning is drawn from the term that was not used as is drawn from the term that was. These stances also position the speaker's relationship with the tar/oil sands themselves, indicating a preferred course of action (pro- or anti-development) and subscribing to a wider ecological philosophy (see Stibbe 2014 for a discussion of Ecolinguistics). In interaction, these wider positions are activated and negotiated and contested in relation to each other (Jaffe 2009). Therefore, in the context of Alberta's tar/oil sands debates, neither tar sands nor oil sands can be considered completely neutral, as both are in direct opposition to each other. In fact, it is argued that no stance can be completely neutral, as 'neutrality is itself a stance' (Jaffe 2000: 3). The ways in which speakers oscillate between the two, like Anne and Jim above, are reflective of the complex positionings that must be managed and negotiated when discussing such controversial issues.

7. Conclusion

Whether social actors use tar sands, oil sands or both terms in alternation has implications for how energy development is discussed in Alberta. Journalists, academics, government officials, and other powerful groups choosing one term or the other will ultimately have effects on how industrial activities in the region are perceived. At the very least, the consistent use of oil sands as a supposed

neutral term may in fact re-affirm dominant discourses of development that fail to highlight critical opposition. On the other hand, the use of tar sands and the accompanying stereotypes associated with its use (e.g. misinformed populace) can have major consequences for the environmental movement in Alberta (e.g. Greenpeace's 'Shut Down the Tarsands' Campaign). One might consider re-introducing the more technical bituminous sands (see Table 1), however, there is danger that one side or the other will appropriate such a prescriptive term. Alternately, as in this paper, one may use the strategy of a hyphenated term (i.e. tar/oil sands) or interchanging terms. Many authors who are critical of development explain up front their use of tar sands, explicitly declaring their stance on the matter (e.g. Nikiforuk 2008). Ultimately, due to the polarization of energy development discussions in Alberta, extreme positions for or against the tar/oil sands will continue to find symbols in the names people use. Additionally, as long as naming practices continue to utilize the frame of resource development, it is resource development that will continue to inform the intended 'use' of the place (see Katz-Rosene 2012; McElhinny 2006). Perhaps instead, it is time to consider new perspectives outside of energy extraction for naming the tar/oil sands altogether.

Notes

[1] All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants.

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Appendix

Background Questionnaire:
Name:

Male ____ Female ____ Age _____

1. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

2. What is your Occupation?

3. Which term do you prefer, 'oil sands' or 'tar sands', and why?

Which term do you use...

a. in conversation with your family?

b. in conversation with your friends?

c. in conversation at work?

d. in conversation in public?

5. What characteristics do you associate with people who use the term 'tar sands'?

6. What characteristics do you associate with people who use the term 'oil sands'?

7. Which of these terms (if any) are neutral? If neither, do you think there is a neutral term?