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# Discourse Analysis and Discursive Psychology

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Discourse analysis is the study of how talk and texts are used to perform actions. Discursive psychology is the application of ideas from discourse analysis to issues in psychology. The primary focus of discursive psychology is on the analysis of interaction considered in fine detail; however, its broader ambition is to provide a novel perspective on almost the full range of psychological phenomena. It is not a method as such; rather it is a perspective that includes meta-theoretical, theoretical, and analytical principles.

Using Chomsky's original distinction, if the main traditions of cognitive and social psychology have been overwhelmingly concerned with peoples' underlying competence, discursive psychology is concerned primarily with performance. The competence focus has encouraged psychologists to use experimental manipulations and other procedures in an attempt to access the underlying cognitive entities and procedures. Performance has often been treated as too messy to be analytically tractable. One way of understanding discursive psychology is as an approach that is developing rigorous analytical procedures for studying performance in the form of video- and audio-recorded and transcribed records of interaction. Its focus is on a very wide range of materials ranging from everyday phone calls between family members, relaxed mealtime conversations, to talk and texts in work and institutional settings, to therapy and counseling talk.

## Development

Discourse analysis has a publication record in social psychology that goes back nearly two decades. The first analytical article was published in a psychology journal in 1985 (Litton & Potter, 1985), and its first major published statement was the book *Discourse and Social Psychology* (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This

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took a number of the central theoretical topics in social psychology, such as attitudes, categories, and the self and showed the virtue of reworking them in discourse-analytical terms. For example, instead of considering categories in terms of schemata for information processing, they could be studied for their practical and interactional role in conversation (Edwards, 1991). The development of discourse analysis ran in parallel to the emergence of a rhetorical approach to psychology. The first article to use a rhetorical analysis was published in 1985 (Billig, 1985) with the first major theoretical overview appearing in 1987 (now published as Billig, 1996). This highlighted the rhetorical dimension of social psychological notions. For example, attitude expressions can be studied as talk designed for use in settings where there is a possibility of argument and where they are simultaneously justifying a position and implicitly countering alternatives (Billig, 1991). Much of this early work was based on the analysis of tape recordings and transcripts of conversational interviews. It also established the centrality of critical themes as researchers focused on issues of sexism, racism, and ideology (Billig et al., 1988).

The early 1990s saw the blurring together of rhetoric and discourse work and the development of discursive psychology out of discourse analysis. This was partly an attempt to distinguish this particular tradition of work from the range of alternative approaches called discourse analysis in linguistics (Brown & Yule, 1983), sociolinguistics (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), poststructuralism (Foucault, 1971), and cognitive psychology (van Dijk & Kintch, 1983). It was also partly an attempt to emphasize that what was being developed was not merely a novel approach to communication or face-to-face interaction but, more ambitiously, a reworking of what psychology is. Edwards and Potter (1992), for example, used analysis of records (including television interviews and newspaper articles) of a set of political disputes to illustrate a novel conception of memory and attribution (see also Edwards & Potter, 1993; for commentaries and responses, see Conway, 1992). Billig (1992) studied conversation about the British Royal Family for the interactional resources they used to undermine arguments for social and political change. Antaki (1994) considered argumentation in terms of its organization in natural settings. More recently, major work in discursive psychology has focused on the way descriptions are made to appear factual (Potter, 1996a) and the way cognitive and psychodynamic notions can be understood in new ways that relate to their role in interaction (Billig, 1999a; Edwards, 1997). I will use the term *discursive psychology* to refer to this tradition of work.

Although early discourse research in psychology tended to be based on a close analysis of conversational interviews, more recent work has focused on records of natural interaction, particularly institutional interaction such as therapy, helpline talk, or case conferences. In part this reflects the influence of successful analytical developments in the related tradition of conversation analysis (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Sacks, 1992). Conversation analysis has demonstrated that it is possible to do rigorous, cumulative, repeatable qualitative studies of interaction. Although there are a range of differences in emphasis, and potential theoretical tensions, discursive psychology and conversation analysis have important areas of overlap (Edwards, 1995). In this chapter I will be less concerned with these differences and will include conversation analytical work as part of the discussion.



The early work in discourse analysis was influenced by, but distinct from, a number of related developments in social psychology. On the one hand, it picked up, and developed, constructionist themes in the work of Rom Harré, John Shotter, and Kenneth Gergen (Gergen, 1982, 1999; Harré, 1979, 1998; Shotter, 1984, 1993). On the other, it drew on, and modified, ideas from Foucaultian and poststructuralist influenced work that was concerned with the construction of self and mind, and its relation to ideology and the reproduction of oppressive social organizations. Notable research came from Valerie Walkerdine, Wendy Hollway, and others (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984; Hollway, 1989; Walkerdine, 1988). More recent thinking done under the rubric of discourse analysis by Ian Parker, Erica Burman, and others has also drawn on poststructuralist or Foucaultian ideas (Burman, 1994; Parker, 1992).

Discursive psychology differs from these strands of work in three principal ways. First, discursive psychology has been more concerned with how analysis can be grounded in specific conversational and textual materials than any of the approaches described previously. Second, discursive psychology focuses on talk and texts within specific social practices rather than conceptualizing discourses as abstract objects as in more poststructuralist work (Potter, Wetherell, Gill, & Edwards,1990). Third, discursive psychology conceptualizes construction as a practical process of the manufacture and stabilization of versions of mind, persons, and reality in talk and texts (Potter, 1996a) rather than treating construction as an abstract process. Although there are these areas of difference, discursive psychology still shares much with these traditions, and they are considerably closer to each other than to much of the mainstream North American tradition of psychology.

## Discourse Analysis and Theory

One of the difficulties in writing about qualitative methods, and about discourse work in particular, is that the terminology available for describing it—*reliability, validity, sampling, factors, variance, hypothesis testing*, and so on—has evolved over a long period of time to fit the requirements of quantitative research using experiments and surveys. This terminology has become so taken for granted it has become difficult to avoid treating it as obvious and natural. Yet it is bound up with assumptions about the nature of action and interaction that are not appropriate for discourse work. So although this chapter will use a number of these conventional terms, they should be treated with caution.

Another difficulty is the assumption that method can be treated as separate from theory. As philosophers and sociologists of science have shown, this is not the case anywhere in science (e.g., Chalmers, 1992; Knorr Cetina, 1999); and it is certainly not for discourse analysis. To understand the rationale for its methodological procedures it is necessary to understand its basic theoretical principles.

### *Theoretical Principles of Discourse Analysis*

The approach to analysis that has been developed in discourse analysis and discursive psychology is partly a product of its conception of human action. This conception emphasizes the following core features of discourse.

ACTION ORIENTATION. Discourse is the primary medium of human action and interaction. Actions are not merely free-standing but are typically embedded in broader practices. Some are generic (e.g., making invitations); some are specific to settings (e.g., air traffic control management of flight crew). The term action *orientation* is meant to discourage the expectation that analysis will discover a one-to-one relationship between discrete acts and certain verbs.

SITUATION. Discourse is situated in three senses. First, it is organized sequentially, such that the primary environment of what is said is what has just come before, and this sets up (although does not determine) what comes next. Second, it may be situated institutionally, such that institutional identities (news interviewee, say) and tasks (managing neutrality in news interviews) may be relevant (although not determine) what takes place. Third, it can be situated rhetorically, such that descriptions may resist actual or potential attempts to counter them as interested.

CONSTRUCTION. Discourse is construct*ed* and construct*ive*. It is constructed in the sense that it is built from various resources (words, of course, but also categories, commonplace ideas, broader explanatory systems). It is constructive in the sense that versions of the world, of events and actions, and of people's phenomenological worlds are built and stabilized in talk in the course of actions. A person may account for his or her absence at a meeting by constructing a version of the city's traffic problems or of his or her own faulty cognitive processing.

These principles may appear rather abstract. However, they have been developed through analytical practice as well as from broader theorizing. They can be illustrated with an example, which can also show some of the analytical mentality of discourse work and the use it makes of detailed transcript.

The following extract is taken from a call to a child abuse helpline in the United Kingdom. It comes near the start of the call directly after the caller has been asked about her willingness to take part in the research and marks the point where the counselor gets onto the business of the call. (The transcription symbols are explained in Exhibit 5.1.)

Extract One (NSPCC–BC1)
**Counselor:** Alright Kath↑ryn .hh so w-what's goin on
**Caller:** Well .hh what it *i:s* is I got
a really close friend an like
hh she's been sexually abu:sed an
**Counselor:** Mm↓m
**Caller:** she's really close to me an I jus
I wanna tell 'er mum but I can't
bring myself to do it



**Exhibit 5.1.** Basic Transcription Symbols

| | |
|---|---|
| Um:: | Colons represent lengthening of the preceding sound; the more colons, the greater the lengthening. |
| I've- | A hyphen represents the cut-off of the preceding sound, often by a stop. |
| ↑Mm↓hmm | Vertical arrows precede marked pitch movement, over and above normal rhythms of speech. Less marked shifts are dealt with by punctuation marks. |
| .,? | Punctuation marks show intonation, not grammar; period, comma, and "question mark" indicate downward, "continuative," and upward contours, respectively. |
| hhh hh .hh<br>P(h)ut | An "h" represents aspiration, sometimes simply hearable breathing, sometimes laughter, etc.; when preceded by a superimposed dot, an (h) marks in-breath; in parenthesis inside a word it represents interpolated laughter. |
| hhh[hh .hhh] er<br>[I just ] | Left brackets represent point of overlap onset; right brackets represent point of overlap resolution. |
| (certainly)<br>((slurred voice)) | Single parentheses mark problematic or uncertain hearings; double parentheses include additional transcriber's comments. |
| (0.2)<br>(.) | Numbers in parentheses represent silence in tenths of a second; a dot in parentheses represents a micro-pause, less than a tenth of a second, hearable but too short to easily measure. |
| °mm hmm° | Degree signs enclose significantly lowered volume. |

**Counselor:** (0.4) tch .hh so:: ↑how did you find
↑out
about ↓that

Action orientation is often the endpoint of analysis rather than the start. Commonly, the analytical goal is to identify the business that is being done in talk, which can be indirect. In this case, for example, the counselor starts with a question and the caller answers. However, this minimal observation does not yet specify what the question is doing. For example, as an opening to the main work of the call the question is asked in such a way that a very wide range of different answers can be offered. This is a valuable practice for a helpline that may receive calls of a highly varied nature. The counselor's question helps to get the interaction going in a way that causes the minimum trouble.

To understand the action orientation of what is going on it is crucial to understand the talk in terms of the way it is situated. First, it is situated in a conversational sequence. For example, the sense of the counselor's question is related to its position at the start of the business. If she had produced it at the end of this sequence, say, it might have appeared challenging, suggesting that the caller is not telling the whole story. Second, there is the more diffuse situation of this being a helpline for reporting abuse. Plainly there is an immediate orientation to this with the caller's answer. For example, she does not build up to talking about troubles through a series of steps, as is common in mundane telephone calls (Jefferson, 1988). Moreover, she does not ask the counselor how

*she* is or what is going on with *her*. Rather, she opens her answer with a report of abuse. One has troubles; one helps; they work with distinct and asymmetric institutional identities. Third, there is the rhetorical character of this talk. Again, this is one of the features to be revealed through analysis rather than something immediately apparent. However, we can note that the caller's descriptions may work against alternatives. For example, by describing herself as a "very close friend" of the abuse victim she may be countering the relevant idea that she is a "snitch" or being vindictive.

All of the situated business of talk is done through it being constructed from various discursive resources. Talk is oriented to action through being put together, and delivered, in specific ways. Some of these are obvious and some subtle. For example, the counselor's question depends on the conventional uses of English words such as "what." However, note the detailed construction. We are not seeing words put together as if pasted from a dictionary. Rather than "what is going on" there is a more colloquial, less formal, "what's goin on." This works rhetorically against any expectations of this being a threatening, formal situation such as a job interview or courtroom examination.

This illustrates the way some of the basic theoretical notions of discursive psychology work in practice. It also starts to flesh out the analytical mentality of discourse research. Let us move on to a more explicit discussion of the stages of discourse work.

## *Questions Discourse Researchers Ask*

Discourse researchers typically ask different questions to those common elsewhere in psychology. These questions reflect the understanding of interaction embodied in its theoretical principles. This is a potential source of confusion, as psychological questions often work from a factors-and-outcomes logic that has been developed with notions of experimental manipulation and the multivariate statistics that go with the analysis of results. Discourse work is not designed to answer questions of the kind, "What is the influence of *X* on *Y*" (of health beliefs on diet, of social class on education success, and so on).

Discourse work typically asks questions of the form, "How is *X* done?" How does a speaker use an identity ascription to disqualify a rival's version of events as a product of their stake in what is going on (Antaki & Horowitz, 2000)? How does a schoolteacher present violent or threatening acts toward pupils as inevitable and necessary to maintain classroom control (Hepburn, 2000)? How does a speaker report a "paranormal experience" in a way that attends to the potential for being discounted as mad or deluded (Wooffitt, 1992)? This focus on how-questions leads to a focus on interaction rather than cognition, a focus on concrete settings rather than abstract scenarios, and a focus on processes rather than outcomes.

A number of general themes appear in this work. For example,

1. *Fact and Evaluation:* There has been a focus on questions involving description, factuality, and evaluation. This includes issues of racism and discrimination that come from the critical theme that has been central in discourse work (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). What procedures do news interviewees use to present their answers as disinterested (Dickerson, 1997)? How are food evaluations organized during family mealtimes (Wiggins & Potter, in press)? How does a speaker (indirectly) display his or her investment in a claim by formulating it in an extreme manner (Edwards, 2000)? This strand of work moves on from rather abstract understandings of construction and constructionism in psychology to consider how construction is done in talk and what is accomplished by it.
2. *Constructions of Psychology:* There has been a focus on the way psychological terms and notions are used in practical settings. How are notions of remembering and forgetting used to manage blame in political hearings (Lynch & Bogen, 1996)? What resources are used to construct and identify "delusional" speech in psychiatric practice (Georgaca, 2000)? How can the psychoanalytical notion of repression be understood in conversational terms (Billig, 1999a)? The challenge is to see how far the basic stuff of psychology can be respecified in terms of practices within particular contexts.
3. *Gender, Psychology, and Feminism:* There has been a major focus on a range of issues related to gender and sexism. This has moved beyond a sociolinguistic concern with gendered speech variations to a consideration of the way particular practices are sustained (Potter & Edwards, 2001). What forms of talk do women have available to understand themselves and their cultural environments when making sense of eating, diet, and body shape (Malson, 1998)? How can the notion of romantic love be reconceptualized in terms of investment in particular stories (Wetherell, 1995)? This is also an area in which important features of the relationship between conversation analysis and discursive psychology are being explored, for example with respect to "saying no" to sex (Kitzinger & Frith, 1999), and considering how gender may be treated as fundamentally relevant to interaction (Stokoe & Smithson, 2001; Wetherell, 1998).
4. *Practices in Work or Institutional Settings:* There has been a focus on interaction as part of the broader organization of activities in a setting such as therapy, medical consultations, classrooms, courtrooms, police or air traffic control rooms, and so on (see Drew & Heritage, 1992a; Engestom & Middleton, 1996; Goodwin, 1997). This is an area in which conversation analysis has made powerful contributions at both analytical and theoretical levels. It is also an area in which important developments in combining analysis of vocal and nonvocal elements of interaction have been made (see Heath, 1997).
5. *Psychologists' Own Work Practices:* There has been a focus on the research practices of psychologists themselves. How are interactional troubles managed in survey interviews (Suchman & Jordan, 1990)? How are questions constructed in market-research focus groups to guide the participants' response style (Puchta & Potter, 1999)? How is interaction in open-ended interviews produced to fit standardized response categories (Antaki, Houtkoop-Steentra, & Rapley, 2000)?

Although it is useful heuristically to split discourse research into particular themes, in practice they overlap with one another.

## Preparing for Analysis

Before any analysis can be started the researcher has to collect materials and prepare them for study.

### *Analytical Materials*

Discourse researchers work with a range of different kinds of materials. Although there is considerable disagreement about the virtues of different sorts of material, there has been a general move away from open-ended interviews and focus groups to the consideration of naturalistic materials and texts. All of these materials have one feature—they involve interaction that can be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. For simplicity, I will concentrate on interviews and naturalistic materials.

For much of the 1980s and early 1990s, open-ended conversational interviews were the principal research materials. The preferred style of interview is a tape-recorded conversation organized around a schedule of topics developed in relationship to the researcher's concerns. Unlike traditional survey interviews, the aim is not to neutrally access information outside the interview but to provide a conversational environment to observe certain practices and to identify the discursive resources drawn on in those practices. For example, in Billig's (1992) study of political ideology he was interested in the way his participants (family groups in the United Kingdom) dealt with issues that raised questions about the legitimacy of British political arrangements. He considered the resources—repertoires of explanation, rhetorical commonplaces—that research participants drew on to sustain that legitimacy against threat. Because of this aim, interviews in discourse work tend to be active and even argumentative.

Interviews in discourse analysis have a range of virtues.

1. *Focus:* Interviews enable the researcher to concentrate on certain predetermined themes. Questions can thus be designed and ordered to provoke participants into using a wide range of their discursive resources.
2. *Standardization:* Interviews provide an opportunity for all participants to address the same set of themes (notwithstanding the contingency of conversation).
3. *Control:* Interviews allow considerable control over sampling. This also eases issues of ethics permissions and recording.

Balanced against this are the following disadvantages.



1. *Psychological Expectations:* Interviews run the risk of flooding the interaction with psychological expectations and categories. Even while the focus is on activities, the research will have to deal with participants' orientation to the interview organization and their speaking position as expert informant or group representative. Such orientations can productively become an analytical focus in their own right (see Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995); more commonly there is a tension between the interview as an activity and as a pathway to something else.
3. *Abstraction:* Interviews abstract participants from the settings in which they live their lives and from the stake and interest they typically have in what is going on. They encourage participants to act as theorists rather than actors.
4. *Relative Value:* If you are interested in a particular setting, relationship counseling, for example, and you have the access and the analytical resources to study it, why restrict yourself to people's abstract talk about it?

Naturalistic materials have become central, however, more because of their intrinsic interest than because of the shortcomings in interviews. They are highly varied. They could be audio- or videotapes of flight crew conversation, relationship counseling sessions, social worker assessment interviews, everyday telephone conversation between friends, and so on. They have a range of advantages.

1. *Actuality:* Naturalistic materials document the thing that is being studied directly. If the researcher is concerned with counseling on an abuse helpline, then counseling is studied (not reports of counseling, theorizing about counseling, conventionalized memories of counseling, and so on). There is no extrapolation from something else involved.
2. *Action Orientation:* Such materials make it easier to capture the action-oriented and situated nature of talk. Actions are studied embedded in sequences of interaction. However subtle the analysis, the disruption of such embedding in interviews is likely to lead to analytical difficulties.
3. *Orientation to Settings:* Materials of this kind make it possible to study participants' orientations to settings and institutions. It is hard to see how one could look at the detailed construction of counselors' questions in the abuse helpline (discussed earlier) without using actual recordings from that helpline. Research with naturalistic materials becomes more easily centered on situated practices rather than persons and their abstract cognitive capacities.

Naturalistic materials often present particular problems of access and ethics, of course, and raise issues of reactivity. Nevertheless, perhaps one of the most novel and potentially useful contributions that discourse work can make to psychology is providing a method for collecting, managing, and analyzing naturalistic materials.

*Recording and Transcription*

One of the major insights of the conversation analyst Harvey Sacks (1992) is the significance of conversational specifics—pauses, intonation, delay, lexical choice, repair, and so on. Rather than seeing such detail as noise blurring the clarity of an underlying signal, Sacks highlighted its key role in interaction. Speakers are enormously attentive to the specifics of interaction. Take the following extract from a phone call.

> Extract Two (from Davidson, 1984, p. 105)
> **A:** C'mon down *he*:re, = it's oka:y,
> (0.2 sec)
> **A:** I got lotta stuff, = *I* got be:er en stuff

Note the way the speaker upgrades the invitation. Why might this be? The likely reason is that the pause of 0.2 of a second is a cue to an impending refusal. Conversational actions such as invitation refusals are typically prefaced by some delay, and research has shown that speakers modify their actions on the basis of such predictions (Drew, in press). This highlights the requirement for research practices that record and represent interaction accurately and in sufficient detail.

Discourse research has been facilitated by the steady improvement of technology in the past two decades. Minidisk recorders are compact and reliable and can capture more than 2 hours of very high quality mono using a flat microphone that is perfectly suited for picking up speech. Videorecorders have likewise become a cheap and compact possibility. Video is more obtrusive and presents certain analytical challenges, but it can provide important information that audio lacks, particularly where the interaction involves important embodied actions.

Digital records make the process of transcribing and managing the materials much simpler and more flexible. Audio and video software allow records to be easily copied, searched, and edited. They also have the capability of disguising voice quality and faces and for eliminating identifying particulars such as names. This is crucial for maintaining anonymity, particularly with sensitive materials.

Various systems for transcribing talk are available. However, discourse researchers have overwhelmingly opted to use the system developed by the conversation analyst Gail Jefferson in the 1960s and 1970s (see Exhibit 5.1). This has the virtues of being quick to learn, being relatively intuitive, and, most important, highlighting features of talk that have been shown to be interactionally important such as intonation and overlap. The simplest way to transcribe is to work with two windows on a computer screen, one running the audio file, the other running the word processor. Audio programs are available that allow a stepwise movement through the file using a physical representation of the wave form that is ideal for timing pauses and noting overlap. (For more detailed discussions of transcription see Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, and ten Have, 1999; and for a brief summary of the main transcription symbols and their use see Exhibit 5.1.)



Transcription is demanding and time-consuming. It can take more than 20 hours to produce a decent transcript of an hour of interaction. The time multiplies if the interaction is complex or the recording is poor quality. The compensation is that transcription involves a very careful listening to the material—for this reason it is recommended that researchers do at least some of their own transcription. In addition, this is often when analytical insights are first developed.

Transcription is a crucial element in discourse work. It simplifies the process of analysis and is highly transportable. It is also the prime medium for presenting material in publication, although the Web will increasingly be used to combine audio materials with written articles. Nevertheless, transcripts inevitably have limitations and should be used in combination with the original audio records.

## Stages of Analysis

Analysis in discourse research is highly varied and depends to some extent on the nature of the materials that are available and how developed research is on the topic or setting of interest. However, most analysis goes through the following four stages that are overlapping, but broadly distinct.

*1. Generating Hypotheses*

Discourse research is not hypothesis-based, as is common elsewhere in psychology. Sometimes a researcher comes to some materials with a broad set of concerns or questions. Equally common is an interest in a setting (relationship counseling, say) and how actions are done in that setting. For this reason the first part of discourse research is often the generation of more specific questions or hypotheses or the noticing of intriguing or troubling phenomena.

This stage of the work often starts during transcription, which provides a major opportunity for carefully listening to the material. Discourse researchers often make analytical notes as they transcribe. It is common and productive to continue this open-ended approach to the data in group sessions where a number of researchers listen to a segment of interaction and explore different ways of understanding what is going on.

*2. Coding: The Building of a Collection*

The main aim of coding is to make the analysis more straightforward by sifting relevant materials from a larger corpus. In traditional terminology it is a form of data reduction; it is a preliminary that facilitates analysis. Typically it involves searching materials for some phenomena of interest and copying the instances to an archive. This is likely to be a set of extracts from sound files and their associated transcripts.

At this stage in the research the coding is inclusive, but coding can continue cyclically throughout the research process as ideas are refined and the under-

standing of the phenomena changes. Often phenomena that were initially seen as disparate merge together while phenomena that seemed singular become broken into different varieties. Problem or doubtful instances will be included in the coding—they may become most analytically productive when considering deviant cases. This kind of coding is quite different from the sorts of coding practice that take place in content analysis where the goal is typically to develop a set of criteria-based categories, count instances in categories, and perform various statistical analyses of the counts.

### 3. Doing the Analysis

Analysis does not follow a fixed set of steps. The procedure used is related to the type of materials used and the sorts of questions being asked. This contrasts it to many styles of psychological research where the justification of the research findings depends on following a set of steps in a precise and orderly manner. In discourse research the procedures for justification are partly separate from the procedures for arriving at analytical claims.

Analysis is a craft skill that can be developed through reading discourse research studies and working with sets of materials. It combines elements of hypothetico–deductivism and inductivism. The researcher will typically develop conjectures about activities through a close reading of the materials and then check the adequacy of these hypotheses through working with a corpus of coded materials. For example, imagine one is interested in the design of opening questions in abuse helpline counseling. We have noted in our example earlier an opening question that is open-ended and constructed in a colloquial manner. To establish the relevance of these features for the activity being done, one would do a number of things.

1. *Search for a Pattern:* We would look through our corpus to see how regular this pattern is. If such a pattern is not common, then our speculation will start to look weak. This is a complicated matter. We might find additional fine-grained organizations. For example, the caller in the example is a child (she describes herself as 12 later in the call, and sounds young). The counselor prefaces her question by addressing her by name. It may be that this is more common with child callers and has a specific role in the interaction. These are new questions to follow up.
2. *Consider Next Turns:* Our hypothesis is that the counselor's turn is designed in the way that it is to head off potential problems with what comes next. If next turns typically go smoothly, then this provides support. If we still see trouble arising this would go against the idea. In general, in discourse work the sequential organization of interaction is a powerful resource for understanding what is going on. As conversation analysts have shown, speaker's utterances display an understanding of the earlier utterance. For example, in the first extract the speaker's following turn is hearably an answer. This provides a participant's confirmation of our analytical intuition that the counselor's turn is a form of question.



3. *Focus on Deviant Cases:* These might be ones in which very different question constructions were used; or where surprising next turns appeared. Such cases are rich analytically. For example, they might cast doubt on our general claim and send us back to the drawing board. If no trouble ensues from very specific opening questions, or ones delivered in a very formal speech style, then we will have little evidence for our conjecture about the role of particular question constructions. However, if our unusual cases lead to trouble of various kinds, then the deviant cases will have provided strong support for the conjecture.
4. *Focus on Other Kinds of Material:* Obviously there is an infinite set of alternative materials that we might use for comparison. However, we might consider other telephone helplines, perhaps where calls have a more specific topic (directory inquiries, flight information) or, on the other hand, mundane calls between friends. This will allow us to get a better handle on the specific business being done and how it works in this counseling helpline, drawing on, or differing from, the business taking place in other settings.

It would be wrong to imply that these four analytical tasks happen sequentially or that all of them will be possible or appropriate in any particular case. They are indicative of the sorts of analytical procedures that researchers go through.

### 4. Validating the Analysis

There is not a clear-cut distinction between validation procedures and analytical procedures in discourse work; indeed some of the analytical themes are also, differently understood, involved in validation. Nevertheless, it is useful to highlight some of the major elements involved in validating claims. Again, not all of them will be relevant in all cases, but individually or together they contribute to establishing the adequacy of particular analyses.

#### Participants' Orientations

The importance of the turn-by-turn nature of interaction has already been emphasized in the analytical section earlier. Any turn of talk is oriented to what came before, and sets up an environment for what comes next. At its simplest, when someone provides an acceptance it provides evidence that what came before was an invitation. If an analyst claims that some conversational move is an indirect invitation, say, we would want to see evidence that the recipient is orientating (even indirectly) to its nature as an invitation. Close attention to this turn-by-turn display of understanding provides one important check on analytical interpretations (Heritage, 1997). This principle is analytically powerful, although not foolproof, and there have been major disputes on its limits for the analysis of phenomena that involve social categories and power (see Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001).

### Deviant Cases

Deviant cases have already been emphasized. However, it is important to note their significant role in the validation of findings. Deviant cases are often the most analytically and theoretically informative. They can show whether a generalization is robust or breaks down. For example, studies of media interviews show that interviewees rarely treat interviewers as accountable for views expressed in their questions. As Heritage and Greatbatch (1991) have shown, this is the normal (indeed, normat*ive,* pattern). There are occasional deviant cases, however, where a news interviewer is treated as responsible for some view. However, rather than showing that this pattern is not normative, these deviations are the exception that proves the rule. Cases of departure can lead to considerable interactional trouble, which interferes with the interviewee making his or her point (Potter, 1996a).

### *Coherence*

The accumulation of findings from different studies allows new studies to be assessed for their coherence with what comes before. For example, work on the organization of food assessments in mealtime conversations (Wiggins & Potter, in press) builds on, and provides additional confirmation of, earlier work on assessments and compliments (Pomerantz, 1984). Looked at the other way around, a study that clashed with some of the basic findings in discourse work would be treated with more caution—although if its findings seemed more robust it would be more consequential.

### *Readers' Evaluation*

One of the most fundamental features of discourse research is that its claims are accountable to the detail of the empirical materials and that the empirical materials are presented in a form that allows readers to make their own checks and judgments. Discourse articles typically present a range of extracts from the transcript alongside the interpretations that have been made of them. This form of validation contrasts with much traditional experimental and content analytical work, where it is rare for anything close to "raw data" to be included, or for more than one or two illustrative codings to be provided. Sacks's (1992) ideal was to put the reader as far as possible into the same position as the researcher with respect to the materials. Such an ideal is unrealizable, but discourse work is closer than many analytical approaches.

Whether used singly or together, these procedures are not a guarantee of validity. Nevertheless, sociologists of science have shown us that guarantees are hard to find where we are talking about even the hardest of sciences. What these procedures offer is a degree of public quality control. Any study that cannot effectively show participants' own orientations to a phenomenon, that cannot deal with deviant cases, that is out of line with previous research, and



that fails to offer convincing interpretations of reproduced extracts is unlikely to be worth serious consideration.

## A Research Illustration: Peräkylä on AIDS Counseling

A wide range of different discourse studies could be used to illustrate the research process. Anssi Peräkylä's (1995) investigation of AIDS counseling is worth considering in detail. It is a major and well-regarded integrative study that addresses a related set of questions about interaction. Its topic is a form of counseling that draws on a well-known family therapy approach so it has an additional psychological interest. It draws heavily on the conversation-analytical perspective on institutional talk developed by Drew and Heritage (1992b) and is worth reading in conjunction with Silverman's (1997) complementary study of HIV-positive counseling that focuses more on advice-giving.

Peräkylä researched counseling for HIV-positive hemophilic and mainly gay-identified men and their partners at a major London hospital. The counselors characterized their practices in terms of Milan School family systems theory and, although this is not the start point of Peräkylä's study, he was able to explicate some of the characteristics of such counseling. He concentrated on 32 counseling sessions taken from a wider archive of recordings (450 hours). The wider archive was drawn on to provide additional examples of phenomena of interest but were not otherwise transcribed. The sessions were videotaped and transcribed using the Jeffersonian system. The analytical process was similar to the one described earlier, with an emphasis on identifying patterns and exceptions, and considering the counseling interaction in relationship to other settings.

Part of the study was concerned with identifying the standard normative turn-taking organization of the counseling. Plainly stated, it is that (a) counselors ask questions; (b) clients answer; (c) counselors comment, advise, or ask more questions. When laid out in this manner the organization may not seem much of a discovery. However, the power of the study is showing how this organization is *achieved* in the interaction—that is, how both counselors and clients collaboratively keep it on track, and how it can be used to address painful and delicate topics such as sexual behavior, illness, and death. An understanding of this normative pattern also provides a way for understanding breakdowns and departures.

Peräkylä goes on to examine various practices that are characteristic of family systems theory, such as circular questioning, where the counselor initially questions the client's partner or a family member about the client's feelings, and live open supervision, where a supervisor may offer questions to the counselor that are, in turn, addressed to the client. The study also identifies some of the strategies by which counselors can address dreaded issues in a manageable way.

The general form of Peräkylä's analysis can be illustrated by his treatment of circular questioning. He starts by considering a practice that is extremely common in everyday interaction for eliciting information or actions indirectly.

This practice involves providing a partial experience of some event as a way of fishing for a more authoritative version (Pomerantz, 1980). Note the following example:

> Extract Three
> **A:** Yer line's been busy.
> **B:** Yeuh my fu (hh)- .hh my father's wife called me

By reporting her side of the event, A elicits a fuller account from B.

Peräkylä noted that a similar practice appears in AIDS counseling. This involves asking the client's partner to provide his or her own understanding of the client's experience. This generates an interaction where "the clients, in an unacknowledged but most powerful way, elicit one another's descriptions of their inner experiences" (Peräkylä, 1995, p. 110). In the following extract the client is called Edward; his partner and the counselor are also present.

> Extract Four (From Peräkylä, 1995, p. 110)
> **Counselor:** What are some of things that you think
> E:dward might have to do.=
> He says he doesn't know where to go from here
> may*be*: and awaiting results and things.
> (0.6)
> What d'you think's worrying him.
> (0.4)
> **Partner:** Uh::m hhhhhh
> I think it's just fear of the unknow:n.
> **Client:** Mm[:
> **Counselor:** [Oka:y.
> **Partner:** [At- at the present ti:me.
> (0.2) Uh:m (.) once: he's (0.5) got a better
> understanding of (0.2) what could happen
> **Counselor:** Mm:
> **Partner:** uh:m how .hh this will progre:ss then:
> I think (.) things will be a little
> more [settled in his=
> **Counselor:** [Mm
> **Partner:** =own mi:nd.
> **Counselor:** Mm:
> (.)
> **Client:** Mm[:
> **Counselor:** [E:dward (.) from what you *know*::
> ((Sequence continues with Edward responding to a direct question with a long and detailed narrative about his fears.))

Peräkylä emphasized the way that the client's talk about his fears is elicited in part through the counselor asking the partner for his own view of those fears. The point is not that the client is *forced* to reveal his experiences; rather, it is that the earlier revelation of his partner's partial view produces an environment in which such a revelation is *expected* and nonrevelation would be a *delicate* and *accountable* matter. In effect, what Peräkylä documents are



the conversational mechanisms that family therapists exploit to do their work and that they characterize in their own literature as using circular questioning to overcome clients' resistance.

## Conclusion

Discursive psychology provides a novel account of the relationship between psychology and discourse. Rather than seeing discourse as the product of psychological processes, it considers the ways in which psychology is produced *in talk as parts of practices.* Its focus moves from the person to the interaction, and therefore from cognition to discourse. Discourse is conceptualized as (a) oriented to action; (b) situated sequentially, institutionally, and rhetorically; (c) construct*ed* from discursive resources and construct*ive* of events, actions, and minds.

These general principles go along with a reconsideration of the central questions psychologists might usefully ask. In particular, there is a move from causal questions of the form "what is the effect of *X* on *Y*" to practical and interactional questions of the form "how is *X* done?" These questions bring with them new topic areas or reconceptualizations of old ones. The focus on how questions combined with the emphasis on discourse being situated encourages a focus either on records of natural interaction or on interviews treated as interaction in its own right.

The general process of discourse research is quite varied. However, it commonly follows four overlapping but conceptually distinct stages: (a) generating hypotheses; (b) building a collection; (c) doing the analysis; and (d) validating the analysis. Ultimately, however, the quality of the research is derived from the ability to show that claims make sense of the organization of materials in all of their detail rather than following a set of stages.

Discourse analysis and discursive psychology are fast-developing approaches. Although a few years ago there were rather more promissory notes and programmatic statements than actual research examples, there is now a considerable body of published work (for reviews and explication see, e.g., Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Edwards, 1997; Wetherell et al., 2001). There is also a range of publications that provide a more detailed account of discourse analytical methods. General overviews of method can be found in Coyle (1995), Gill (1996), Potter and Wetherell (1987), Potter (1996b, 1997), Wood and Kroger (2000), and Wooffitt (1993). Potter and Wetherell (1994) work through the process of analysis with a single example. Billig (1997) and Potter and Wetherell (1995) discussed the analysis of broad themes and interpretative repertoires drawn on in interview talk. Potter (1998) compared grounded theory, ethnography, and discourse analysis in the analysis of clinical materials. Edwards and Potter (2001) discussed discursive psychological analysis of the role of psychological talk in institutions. Wetherell, Taylor, and Yates (2001) introduced and compared a range of different approaches to analyzing discourse. Silverman (2001) considered discourse and conversation analysis in the context of broader issues in qualitative analysis.

I will end by commenting on some of the tensions in current discourse research and some of its future directions. I have already noted a tension between a focus on interview work as against a focus on the use of naturalistic materials. There is also something of a tension between work that starts with a concern with social critique and work that starts with a concern with discovery and understanding. A particularly significant recent tension is around the role of theory in guiding analysis of the categories that are relevant to interaction as opposed to focusing on those categories that are described or oriented to interaction. In a medical interaction, say, are the categories *male doctor* and *women patient* relevant because of a theoretical judgment about the significance of such categories, or should analysis look for evidence of orientations to and displays of gender and medical authority? An illuminating and sometimes heated debate has taken place around this issue (see Billig, 1999b, 1999c; Schegloff, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Wetherell, 1998). This debate has raised some important and subtle analytical issues, and encouraged all analysts to consider their practices carefully.

Three themes and directions for the future are worth highlighting. First, there is an increasing interest in the nature of cognition and how it should be understood in interaction. Edwards (1997) has already laid out many of the significant issues. Perhaps the most basic is whether discursive psychology should *supplement* traditional cognitive and social cognitive work in psychology or whether it should provide a respecification of cognition that will *supplant* that work. Chapters in te Molder and Potter (in press) explore various stances on the nature of cognition and its relationship to discourse and interaction.

Second, there is likely to be an increasing focus on institutional talk. There are many institutional settings (classrooms, therapy sessions, drug rehabilitation centers) where psychological issues (learning, insight, change) are both topic and part of the texture of the interaction. In contrast to the psychological project common in much mainstream North American work, which attempts to identify general laws and patterns that will have their effect in any particular situation, this work starts with the specificity of the situation before considering what might be more general.

Third, there is an increasing interest in practical uses of discourse work. How can the detailed study of practices input into training, for example? One possibility is that by explicating practices of counseling, say, counselors will be enabled to make more informed and strategic judgments about what they do. As yet this has been a theme that has been little developed; nevertheless, it is likely to become more prominent as discourse research evolves.

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# 6

# Narrative Psychology and Narrative Analysis

*Michael Murray*

> It was long ago, and long ago it was; and if I'd been there, I wouldn't be here now; and if I were here, and then was now, I'd be an old storyteller, whose story might have been improved by time, could he remember it. Three good points about stories: if told, they like to be heard; if heard, they like to be taken in; and if taken in, they like to be told. Three enemies of stories: endless talk, the clash of a mill, the ring of an anvil. (Carson, 1999, p. 1)

This quotation is the opening paragraph from a prose work by the Irish writer Ciarán Carson. It provides an introduction to a wondrous book of tales in which Carson intertwines stories told to him by his father with versions of ancient Greek myths and with stories about Dutch painters. It also provides a fitting introduction to this chapter in that it summarizes both the pervasiveness of storytelling in everyday social interaction, the role of plot and memory in narrative, and how in the modern era storytellers have become self-conscious of the telling.

Brian Richardson (2000) began his introduction to a recent special issue of the journal *Style* devoted to the study of narrative with the sentence, "Now, narrative is everywhere" (p. 168). Whereas 20 years ago the study of narrative was confined to literary scholars it has now spread across all the disciplines, from the humanities through the various social sciences and even touching the physical sciences (Nash, 1990). It is perhaps because of the very pervasiveness of stories in everyday life that, until recently, few psychologists have been interested in studying narrative.

Narrative psychology is concerned with the structure, content, and function of the stories that we tell each other and ourselves in social interaction. It accepts that we live in a storied world and that we interpret the actions of others and ourselves through the stories we exchange. Through narrative we not only shape the world and ourselves but they are shaped for us through narrative. In this chapter we review the nature of the narrative turn within psychology, detail how to conduct narrative interviews, and consider some forms of narrative analysis.