

4. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION WITH EXAMPLES

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4.1. INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis is an indirect form of observation, that concentrates on the written or spoken words used in communication.

"Discourse analysis treats the social world as a text, or rather as a system of texts which can be systematically 'read' by a researcher to lay open the psychological processes that lie within them.." (Banister et al 1994 p92). In other words, the researcher is looking for the underlying social assumptions in interactions.

In particular, the ideas seen as "common sense":

Some discourses or constructions are so familiar that they appear as 'common sense'. If these discourses are deconstructed or taken apart it becomes possible to see how certain dominant ideologies have become 'taken for granted', and from this point consideration can be given to alternative discourses.. (Marshall 1992 p203).

4.2. LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE

Discourse or ideas are "carried" in language, so the focus is upon language.

Language "exists as a domain of social action, of communication and culture, whose relations to the external world of event, and to the internal world of cognitions, are a function of the social and communicative actions talk is designed to do" (Edwards et al 1992 p442).

Wetherell and Maybin (1996) gave three features of language use which challenged the assumption that language is neutral:

i) Language has an "action orientation" - utterances state information, and perform an action. In an argument, individuals are not just stating opposite facts, but are using language to justify their position and undermine

the other's. Individuals are doing something with our utterances.

ii) Language is part of the social world - rather than language simply telling us about the social world; it is a "constitutive part of those actions, events and situations" (p244).

iii) Indexical property of discourse - all language is defined by the context of its use.

The whole emphasis is away from language as referring to objects "out there" to the idea that language is about building the social reality. The same event can be described in a number of different ways. It is always possible to see how the choice of words can influence the whole understanding of an event. For example, during a news report, the use of words like "murdered", "killed", "slaughtered" - all set the context for understanding the perpetrators as good or bad. Taken a step further, with language the individual is also defining themselves.

Interactions involving language are negotiations where the participants are using their language carefully to establish the meaning of the situation (for example, to show that they are blameless in an argument), and consequently to set the meaning of themselves. This is called the "double property of talk" (Wetherell and Maybin 1996).

The term "discourse" can also mean different things - sometimes a word for language, others "a linguistic object that can be counted and described" (Potter 2004).

Discourses fulfill a number of functions:

a) At an interpersonal level, they are used to explain and attribute causes of behaviour;

b) They have a "political" function of setting out norms and standards against which behaviour is judged;

c) Discourses maintain differences between categories of people by making the similarities between these categories invisible and the differences visible.

It is possible to see discourses at work if we take the example of a rise in water levels leading to a flood. How this event is explained will make use of different discourses, including "meteorological discourse" (unusually heavy rain), "greenhouse effect discourse" (changing global climate), "political management discourse" (failure to build flood defences), or "God's

anger discourse" (punishment for sins)(Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). Which discourse(s) used makes sense of the event, and of the individual themselves.

The aim of discourse analysis is to study the entire discourse - "what is said, in what way, by whom and for what purpose" (Hogg and Vaughan 1995 p509).

Wetherell and Potter (1992) believed that discourse analysis focuses on the "activities of justification, rationalisation, categorization, attribution, making sense, naming, blaming and identifying" which are "quintessential psychological activities" (p2).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) have shown that the way individuals construct their arguments can be used to show the underlying social assumptions. This is the focus on rhetoric.

Potter and Wetherell (1995) highlighted six central themes with the use of discourse analysis:

i) Practices and resources

The aim is to look at "what people do with their talk and writing" (known as discourse practices), and the resources used to achieve this aim (the categories and interpretative repertoires used). An interpretative repertoire (Potter and Wetherell 1987) is "a recognizable routine of arguments, descriptions and evaluations distinguished by familiar cliches, common phrases, tropes and characterizations of actors and situations" (Edley and Wetherell 2001 p443).

ii) Construction and description

This is the study of "how people assemble (versions of) the world in the course of their interactions".

iii) Content

The focus on what is said.

iv) Rhetoric

Within discourses are inbuilt "argumentative organisations" ie what is said is in reference to an imaginary counter-argument.

v) Stake and accountability

People are treated as having an interest (stake) in

their actions.

vi) Cognition in action

It is more important to study what is actually said than an individual's cognitive attitudes.

Table 4.1 outlines the main advantages and disadvantages of discourse analysis.

<u>ADVANTAGES</u>	<u>DISADVANTAGES</u>
1. Focus on what is said.	1. Language given too much emphasis: ie plays down cognitive processes.
2. Highlight underlying social assumptions in communication.	2. Argues against language as means of communication only.
3. Shows how behaviour is socially constructed.	3. Subjective interpretation of research.
4. Shows meanings of behaviour.	4. Problems of validity and reliability.

Table 4.1 - Advantages and disadvantages of discourse analysis.

4.3. DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Hepburn and Wiggins (2005) pointed out that discursive psychology (DP) is a "broad title for a range of research done in different disciplinary contexts" including language and communication, psychology, and sociology.

Potter (2005) made this distinction between "traditional psychology and DP:

Traditional psychology perspectives focus on giving a technical account of the actual psychological states, processes and entities that underpin (and thereby partly explain) action. Discursive psychology focuses on psychology from the position of participants - it considers their practical and situational constructions, terms, orientations and displays (p740).

Potter (2005) the argued that DP has a number of elements:

i) Practical

The study of practice: ie how psychology categories are used. For example, not remembering some information or event can be used to resist an accusation. Traditional psychology focuses upon the cognitive processes of not remembering rather than it being a process of social construction.

ii) Accountable

How individuals construct themselves as accountable (control and responsibility) for their behaviour or not. For example, the desire to conserve water is outside an individual's control with the pressure of neighbours to water the garden properly (Kurz et al 2005).

iii) Situated

Psychology is situated or embedded in the present interaction. For example, a measurement of an attitude is not an objective process by the product of who and how the attitude is being measured.

iv) Embodied

DP focuses on discourse, and, in particular, how it constructs the body rather than the study of the body itself.

v) Displayed

DP rejects the inner, private world and concentrates upon what is said (displayed) publicly. Mind and intention are visible in talk rather than lying behind it. There is no attempt "to explain actions by reference to underlying cognitive states or processes" in DP.

DP is interested in analysing the devices used in speech as individuals construct themselves for themselves and for others. For example, Auburn (2005) analysed the interactions of sex offenders in therapy, and highlighted the idea of "narrative reflexivity". This is where the speaker shifts in their narrative from past events to current ideas. One offender describing their use of rape said: "she was petrified I know that now".

The speaker shows that they are now aware of the past mistakes (in this case the belief that the victim had consented). This is a requirement of the therapy situation - to show reflection and realisation. It could

be asked whether the offender really believes that now, but that assumes an inside (beliefs) and outside (talk). DP challenges this distinction and focuses upon what is said. Whether the offender would revert to past beliefs in a future situation is something that DP may not be able to answer.

4.4. THREE EXAMPLES OF THE USE OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

1. Kurz et al (2005) Environmentally Sustainable Behaviour

This research was based upon 30-45 minute interviews with members of nine households in Perth, Western Australia. The topic of the interview related to water and energy conservation.

The researchers noted that despite the interviewer maintaining a neutral position, many of the participants "often appeared to position the interviewer as being sympathetic to an 'environmental agenda'" (p606). This challenges any idea that the interview can take place in a vacuum as long as the interviewer is neutral. Participants are trying to make sense of the interview in the wider context as well as of the questions themselves, and consequently positioning themselves in relation to that. This may have influenced the themes that emerged from the interviews.

a) Water as a "precious commodity"

Water is "constructed as being a finite entity that runs the risk of depletion if not conserved or managed correctly" (p607) as shown by an "extreme case formulation" (Pomerantz 1986):

"As our population grows.. so it is inevitable that one day we are going to reach the stage that we are going to have too many people for too little water.." (D; extract 1; p607).

Extreme case formulations involve emphasising the worse situation, in this example, in order to show the commonsense position. It is obvious that water is not infinite, and a pro-conservation position is the "correct" stance.

b) Suburban aesthetics

Even if pro-conservation is the obvious position, there are competing discourses around the "good lawn":

"..is a very nice place to live and I'm lucky that I live there. But if I didn't water my street lawn and let it die it would stick out like a sore toe.. So I am under pressure to maintain a good lawn.." (D; extract 5; p609).

The speaker positions themselves as forced to water their lawn regularly despite their awareness above of finite water resources. It is as if the speaker is saying: "I want to save water, but circumstances force me not to". The removal of responsibility is a key defence.

c) Positioning of the self

When talking about the use of energy, individuals made a distinction between themselves and others; for example:

".. We try to turn our lights off when we go out of a room and just small things like that. But I know a lot of people that wouldn't bother" (K; extract 11; p614).

Speaker K is constructing their argument in relation to the potential criticism of wasting energy. They use two devices:

i) Show that they do not waste energy by highlighting a small action (turning off lights);

ii) Compare themselves to individuals who are worse. Again they are almost saying: "Even if you accuse me of waste, I'm not as bad as other people".

Individuals are always aware of potential criticisms, particularly as the interviewer was positioned as "pro-environment". Other techniques are used to emphasise that the speaker is not wasteful:

- R admitted to using water in frequent showers, for example, but "in this climate" that was a necessity;
- S, in receiving negative feedback from the local authorities about their water use, questioned the validity of the comparison with a "supposed similar household", and also highlighted that their household's use was down compared to the past;
- S later referred to being committed to "sort of the 'greenie' approach". Thus by defining themselves as a "greenie" it negates any criticism of their high energy and water use.

This research by Kurz et al showed two things. Firstly, that the interviewee will always be aware of potential criticisms (in this case from a supposedly "pro-environment" interviewer). Secondly, positioning "the other as being responsible for the wasting of resources, while positioning the self as merely a user of resources" (p617).

2. Charteris-Black (2006) Immigration Discourses

Immigration is a hotly debated topic in many countries, especially in Western Europe in recent years. When talking about immigration, politicians often use metaphors to simplify the facts or to stir the emotions among other things. Often metaphors have negative associations and link to fears. The most obvious example being terms like "invasion" or "flooded".

Santa Anna's (1999) study of "The LA Times" found metaphors relating to "immigrants are animals" (eg "ferreting out illegal immigrants"), and "immigrants are weeds" (eg "new crop of immigrants").

In another US study, O'Brien (2005) noted the metaphors of "immigrant as object" (eg object of labour), and "organism metaphor" (eg immigrants are "digested" or "absorbed" as if food).

Charteris-Black (2006) analysed thirteen speeches given by members of the British Conservative Party relating to "asylum and Immigration" between July 2002 and April 2005, and articles from party manifestos (Conservative and British National Party (BNP) in elections between 2001 and 2005), from MigrationWatch UK, and from "The Daily Mail" and "The Daily Telegraph" on the same issues. This produced a "British right-wing corpus". The research was particularly interested in the use of metaphor in persuading the receiver in relation to immigration. Right-wing parties tend to be against immigration.

Charteris-Black (2006) drew out two types of metaphors from his research - metaphors of natural disaster, and container metaphors. "What both 'disaster' and 'container' metaphors have in common is that they discourage empathy with immigrants by treating them as objects, rather than as the subjects of life stories" (p569).

A. Immigration as "natural disaster"

Individual metaphors within this category related to "an excessive flood of water":

- "massive and unnecessary wave of immigrants.." (BNP 2004 manifesto);
- "a nightly tidal wave of asylum seekers from Cherbourg" (Daily Telegraph 25/8/02);
- "flood" linked to immigration on 56 occasions in Daily Telegraph;
- "a growing flood of Roma asylum seekers.." (Migrationwatch UK).

"Flood based natural disaster metaphors may be employed as legitimate because they fit in with underlying myths related to Britain as an island that has been historically threatened by invasion.." (Charteris-Black 2006 p572).

B. Britain as a container metaphors

This category of metaphors related to containers:

- With limited capacity: "Britain is full up.." (BNP 2005 manifesto);
- In relation to security: troops "redeployed to secure the Channel Tunnel and Kent ports against illegal immigrants" (BNP 2005 manifesto);
- Opening the container: ".. as Britain prepared to open its gates to a flood of immigrants.." (Daily Telegraph 4/4/04);
- Building up of pressure in the container: ".. Europe's most densely-populated country was full to bursting point.." (Daily Mail 11/12/04).

This research by Charteris-Black (2006) highlighted the use of metaphor in political discourse as a means of legitimising certain views.

3. Edley and Wetherell (2001) Views on Feminism

This research used two sets of group interviews with men about their views on feminism. The first set were 17-18 year olds at an independent boys' school in the UK, and the other was Open University students. The topic of discussion was introduced as "What is a feminist (feminism)?" and "What do you think of feminism?".

Discourse analysis of the interviews identified a "Jekyll and Hyde" binary which presented feminism as reasonable/unreasonable. On the one hand, feminists were seen as wanting equality (which is reasonable), but, at the same time, there was an unreasonable side:

"Simon: Well, I think they want us all to jump in the river don't they really? Kill ourselves?.. they just

hate men.." (extract 4 p444).

The binary positions appear separately as either/or positions, but also "men's accounts of feminism moved backwards and forwards across the discursive field these two interpretative repertoires establish" (p444).

The unreasonable side was presented as extremism and wanting more than the "middle-of-the-road" desire for equality:

"Aaron: They want everything.. they want to go past the half way line.. Yeah 'Right we'll let you live to the age thirty and collect your semen and then we'll cut you off.. and then we can just live as women'.." (extract 14 p448).

By emphasising the extreme position as unreasonable, it allowed the speakers to criticise equality indirectly. Equality is beyond reproach and cannot be openly criticised by "reconstructed males" today. Edley and Wetherell argued that equality for women becomes presented as sameness and in comparison to the "gold standard" set by men:

"Neil: If you want feminism you've got to take the good with the bad like get down the pit and get in the front line.." (extract 20 p452).

Discourse analysis used here helps to show the complex and subtle use of rhetorical positions including contradictions, and the ability to criticise something without appearing to criticise it.

4.5. THREE PROBLEMS WITH DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY

1. The emphasis on text tends to ignore the actual person who speaks and their emotional experiences in interactions. Individuals are not just "political animals" saying things to position themselves in different ways, but are emotionally involved in interactions.

Thus it neglects the inner world:

In its remorseless concern with the details of what people are saying about the world (and what they are doing when they are saying it), it appears to throw out the psychology baby with the bathwater" (Dixon 2007 p159).

2. DP makes no attempt to explain the cause of behaviour, only how the individual makes sense of the behaviour in their talk.

3. DP can be accused of arguing that "there is nothing meaningful outside discourse - nothing that is extra-

discursive" (Finlay and Langridge 2007 p185). Finlay and Langridge believed that the physical body and its activities, for example, are "extra-discursive".

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