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# **DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

*Investigating Processes  
of Social Construction*

**NELSON PHILLIPS  
CYNTHIA HARDY**

Qualitative Research Methods  
Volume 50

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## SERIES EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

How do our notions of a "nation," the "individual," or even the "social" come about, solidify, shift, reemerge, and guide our thought and action? How do such taken-for-granted ideas concerning work, family, freedom, and authority become seemingly natural, objective, autonomous features of the world? How do these presuppositions influence, for example, the way we judge refugees as attractive and welcome or disruptive and dangerous? Or more critically, what is a refugee anyway? What constitutes the definitional character of such a label, and when do we apply it to specific people and groups? What are the consequences of our talk (and application)?

These questions (and more) are bedrock dilemmas associated with any investigation of the social world. They are messy matters to say the least, but they cut to the core of social science and raise quite serious empirical, epistemological, and philosophical questions about what is "real." They are subversive questions to be sure. When taken seriously, they undermine our often too confident sense that language and representation are unproblematic. To examine discourse requires an investigator to ask—in highly specified contexts—just how particular ideas, concepts, and perspectives come into being and are sustained. Moreover, it asks what the consequences are of a specified discourse for particular parties (some of whom may not have had much to do with the forming of a set discourse but must nonetheless live with the results).

Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy, in this the 50th volume of the Sage Series on Qualitative Research Methods, provide a crisp, elegant, and quite practical introduction to this growing field. *Discourse Analysis*, as the authors make clear, is more than a simple method of discovery. It rests on a powerful theory detailing and explaining how the social world is understood. The empirical materials of discourse consist of sets of texts and the practices that surround their production, dissemination, and reception. As a domain of study, discourse analysis concerns not only selected texts but the history and context associated with these texts. How such texts can be unpacked and understood as "reality constructors" is the point and purpose of this volume. Both are worthy, timely, and well served.

J. V. M.  
P. K. M.  
M. L. M.

## PREFACE

What is discourse analysis? How do I do it? These two questions, asked in different ways by a variety of students and colleagues, have led us to write this book. The recent interest in discourse analysis as a method has led to a growing number of books and articles on the topic. However, no book has appeared that provides a concise, straightforward guide to the practice of discourse analysis combined with a discussion of the philosophy that underlies it. We have tried to fill this gap in the literature by providing a concise practical guide for researchers who are interested in understanding and using discourse analysis. The book has been written with a broad and diverse audience in mind: doctoral students who are starting out their careers by embarking on discourse analysis; more seasoned researchers who are turning to discourse analysis to complement other modes of inquiry; experienced discourse analysts who are interested in seeing how other researchers have used this methodology; and finally to academics who want to learn about discourse analysis to understand other authors' work even if they do not intend to use it themselves.

How successful we are in providing a guide that motivates and helps aspiring discourse analysts we leave to our readers to judge. We do know that, from our perspective, it has been a rewarding experience to reflect on how discourse analysts have begun to create their own discourse of organizations through the growing number of conferences, workshops, books, special issues, and articles on the topic and how our own approach has developed within the context of these broader events. Although we find the growth of discourse analysis encouraging, at the same time, we would not want this methodology to become so institutionalized that it loses its highly reflexive nature. As methods become formalized, they run the risk of being reified into a sort of research machine where researchers are reduced to technicians who simply turn a methodological handle and produce "truth." A major advantage of working in a new area is the constant pressure to think about your own role in the research process and to be aware of how you have "made it all up." We have found that the benefits of such regular reflection on the nature of research and the role of the researcher have far outweighed the difficulties of using a relatively undeveloped methodology.

Like all academic work, this book only exists because of the help and creative insights of a number of other people. We are particularly indebted to two friends and colleagues with whom many of the ideas that appear in this book were first developed. Tom Lawrence and Steve Maguire have been our coauthors in a stimulating and productive collaboration that has formed the foundation of our understanding of discourse analysis. Over the course of several research projects, and a number of books and articles, we have learned to apply and explain discourse analysis by working with them. Thanks, guys—we owe you a beer.

We would also like to acknowledge Davide Ravasi, Ian Palmer, and Stewart Clegg, with whom we have written papers we refer to in this book, as well as Susan Ainsworth, André Spicer, David Grant, and Cliff Oswick, who reviewed an early draft of the manuscript. Reading a first draft is never an easy task, and we appreciate the time and effort you all put into reading and commenting on this book. We would also like to thank the editors of Sage's Qualitative Research Methods series, especially John Van Maanen, for their encouragement and insight. On a pragmatic note, this book was written while Nelson Phillips was a Dyason Universitas 21 Visiting Fellow at the University of Melbourne. We would like to acknowledge the University of Melbourne's support, which made the writing of this book possible. Finally, on a more personal note, Nelson would like to thank Deana for her consistent good humor and support despite missed dinners and curtailed vacations. He promises not to write another one for a while. Cynthia would like to thank Jerry for missing that bus—who knows what would have happened to the book otherwise.

# DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

## *Investigating Processes of Social Construction*

NELSON PHILLIPS  
*University of Cambridge*

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*University of Melbourne*

### 1. WHAT IS DISCOURSE ANALYSIS?

*Her knowledge of me was so deep, her version so compelling,  
that it held together my miscellany of identities. To be sane, we  
choose between the diverse warring descriptions of our selves;  
I chose hers. I took the name she gave me, and the criticism,  
and the love, and I called the discourse me.*

Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (2000, p. 510)

This book is about discourse. More specifically, it is about the power of incomplete, ambiguous, and contradictory discourses to produce a social

reality that we experience as solid and real. We understand discourse in the radical, constitutive way of Rushdie's character: The things that make up the social world—including our very identities—appear out of discourse. To put it another way, our talk, and what we are, are one and the same. But we differ from Rushdie's character in that we do not believe individuals always have the luxury of choosing their identity, their truth, and their reality. We think our experience is largely written for us by the multitude of conflicting discourses of which we are a part. This is not to say that we do not strategically draw upon these discourses. We obviously do. But our ability to act strategically is limited by the discourses that accompany our intervention and the complex processes of social construction that precede it. Our view of discourse can be summarized in a sentence: Without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experiences, or ourselves.

Recognizing the profound role of talk and texts in everyday life is only the beginning. This book is also about the process of analyzing discourse and the potential of this methodology for revealing the processes of social construction that constitute social and organizational life. Discourse analysis offers new opportunities for researchers to explore the empirical ramifications of the linguistic turn that has worked its way through the social sciences and humanities in the last 20 years. Whereas other qualitative methods provide well-developed approaches for understanding the social world and the meaning it has for the people in it, discourse analysis goes one step further in embracing a strong social constructivist epistemology (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1999). It focuses attention on the processes whereby the social world is constructed and maintained. It also includes the academic project itself within its analysis; with its emphasis on reflexivity, discourse analysis aims to remind readers that in using language, producing texts, and drawing on discourses, researchers and the research community are part and parcel of the constructive effects of discourse.

We wrote this book for three reasons. First and foremost, we find discourse analysis to be a compelling theoretical frame for observing social reality. This book represents our attempt to clarify the contribution that discourse analysis can make to the study of individuals, organizations, and societies. Second, we have found discourse analysis to be a useful method in a number of empirical studies and have increasingly adopted it over the last 10 years. We want to encourage other researchers to adopt this approach and believe that a short, simple introduction will help in this regard. Third, we have spent considerable time over the last 10 years struggling with the

difficulties of applying discourse analysis to different contexts. By writing this book, we hope to save other researchers from having to go through the same struggles. By providing a general framework for understanding different forms of discourse analysis and applying them to empirical studies of organizational, interorganizational, and societal phenomena, we hope to save other researchers from having to "reinvent the wheel."

## Defining Discourse Analysis

There are many definitions of discourse and discourse analysis in the literature. In fact, in his introduction, van Dijk suggested that the entire 700 pages of the recent two-volume set on discourse (1997a, 1997b) is really an "elaborate answer" to a deceptively simple question: What is discourse? Yet, despite the difficulty of the task, we need some general idea of what we are referring to when we use *discourse analysis* and related terms. We also need to differentiate between discourse analysis and other qualitative methods that explain the meaning of social phenomena. In this section, we present some of the important terms that relate to discourse analysis. We also describe its status as a methodology rather than just a method, that is, an epistemology that explains how we know the social world, as well as a set of methods for studying it. In this way, we differentiate discourse analysis from other qualitative research methods, such as ethnography (Erickson & Stull, 1997; Schwartzman, 1993), ethnomethodology (Coulon, 1995), conversation analysis (Psathas, 1995), and narrative analysis (Czarniawska, 1998; Riessman, 1993).

## Defining Our Terms

Discourse, in general terms, refers to actual practices of talking and writing (Woodilla, 1998). Our use of the term is somewhat more specific: We define a discourse as an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, that brings an object into being (Parker, 1992). For example, the collection of texts of various kinds that make up the discourse of psychiatry brought the idea of an unconscious into existence in the 19th century (Foucault, 1965). In other words, social reality is produced and made real through discourses, and social interactions cannot be fully understood without reference to the discourses that give them meaning. As discourse analysts, then, our task is to explore the relationship between discourse and reality.

Discourses are embodied and enacted in a variety of texts, although they exist beyond the individual texts that compose them. Texts can thus be considered a discursive “unit” and a material manifestation of discourse (Chalaby, 1996). Texts may take a variety of forms, including written texts, spoken words, pictures, symbols, artifacts, and so forth (Grant, Keenoy, & Oswick, 1998).

Texts are the sites of the emergence of complexes of social meanings, produced in the particular history of the situation of production, that record in partial ways the histories of both the participants in the production of the text and of the institutions that are “invoked” or brought into play, indeed a partial history of the language and the social system, a partiality due to the structurings of relations of power of the participants. (Kress, 1995, p. 122)

Texts are not meaningful individually; it is only through their interconnection with other texts, the different discourses on which they draw, and the nature of their production, dissemination, and consumption that they are made meaningful. Discourse analysis explores how texts are *made* meaningful through these processes and also how they contribute to the constitution of social reality by *making* meaning (Phillips & Brown, 1993).

Discourse analysis is thus interested in ascertaining the constructive effects of discourse through the structured and systematic study of texts (Hardy, 2001). Discursive activity does not occur in a vacuum, however, and discourses do not “possess” meaning. Instead, discourses are shared and social, emanating out of interactions between social groups and the complex societal structures in which the discourse is embedded. Accordingly, if we are to understand discourses and their effects, we must also understand the context in which they arise (Sherzer, 1987; van Dijk, 1997a).

Discourse is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking context into consideration. . . . Discourses are always connected to other discourses which were produced earlier, as well as those which are produced synchronically and subsequently. (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 277)

Our approach to the study of discourse is therefore “three-dimensional” (Fairclough, 1992), in the sense that it connects texts to discourses, locating them in a historical and social context, by which we refer to the particular actors, relationships, and practices that characterize the situation under study.

Consider an example: To understand from a discourse analytic perspective why a particular person is a refugee, we need to explore how discourses such as asylum, immigration, humanitarianism, and sovereignty, among others, serve to make sense of the concept of a refugee. To learn how such

discourses have evolved over time, we can study texts such as cartoons, newspaper articles, and international conventions. We must also examine the social context—wars, natural disaster, court decisions, international agreements, the government of the day, political events in other countries—to see how they are brought into play in particular discursive events. This interplay between text, discourse, and context helps us to understand not only how an individual comes to be a refugee, but also how the broader “reality” of refugee policy and refugee determination procedures is constructed and experienced.

In summary, our interest in the relation between discourse and social reality requires us to study individual texts for clues to the nature of the discourse because we can never find discourses in their entirety. We must therefore examine selections of the texts that embody and produce them (Parker, 1992). We cannot simply focus on an individual text, however; rather, we must refer to *bodies* of texts because it is the interrelations between texts, changes in texts, new textual forms, and new systems of distributing texts that constitute a discourse over time. Similarly, we must also make reference to the social context in which the texts are found and the discourses are produced. It is this connection between discourses and the social reality that they constitute that makes discourse analysis a powerful method for studying social phenomena.

### Discourse Analysis as Method and Methodology

The reason discourse analysis tries to include a concern with text, discourse, and context relates to the fact that it represents a methodology—not just a method—that embodies a “strong” social constructivist view of the social world (Gergen, 1999). Discourse analytic approaches share an interest in the constructive effects of language and are a reflexive—as well as an interpretive—style of analysis (Parker & Burman, 1993). In this regard, discourse analysis does not simply comprise a set of techniques for conducting structured, qualitative investigations of texts; it also involves a set of assumptions concerning the constructive effects of language.

[Discourse analysis] is not only about method; it is also a perspective on the nature of language and its relationship to the central issues of the social sciences. More specifically, we see discourse analysis as a related collection of approaches to discourse, approaches that entail not only practices of data collection and analysis, but also a set of metatheoretical and theoretical assumptions and a body of research claims and studies. (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. x)

Discourse analysis shares the concern of all qualitative approaches with the meaningfulness of social life (Winch, 1958), but it attempts to provide a more profound interrogation of the precarious status of meaning. Traditional qualitative approaches often assume a social world and then seek to understand the meaning of this world for participants. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, tries to explore how the socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world were created in the first place and how they are maintained and held in place over time. Whereas other qualitative methodologies work to understand or interpret social reality as it exists, discourse analysis endeavors to uncover the way in which it is produced. This is the most important contribution of discourse analysis: It examines how language constructs phenomena, not how it reflects and reveals it. In other words, discourse analysis views discourse as constitutive of the social world—not a route to it—and assumes that the world cannot be known separately from discourse.

Discourse analysis is thus distinguished by its commitment to a strong social constructivist view and in the way it tries to explore the relationships between text, discourse, and context. Although studies vary in the degree to which they combine text and context (as we discuss in Chapter 2), discourse analysis presupposes that it is impossible to strip discourse from its broader context and uses different techniques to analyze texts for clues to the discourses within which they are embedded. In this regard, discourse analysis is different from other forms of qualitative research. For example, approaches such as narrative analysis and conversational analysis typically study text or talk. They take context into account to ascertain meaning, but usually without reference to broader discourses or the accumulated bodies of texts that constitute them. Although interested in how narratives and conversations are constructed, these approaches devote less explicit attention to the construction of a broader social reality. Similarly, ethnographies often aim at uncovering the meaning of a social reality for participants but are less concerned with how that social reality came into existence through the constructive effects of various discourses and associated texts. Ethnomethodology focuses on the generative rules that make social interrelationships possible, but its focus is on the observation of actions rather than on the study of texts. In Box 1.1, we provide an example to show the ways in which quantitative and qualitative researchers might approach a phenomenon and contrast them with how discourse analysts would study it.

### Box 1.1

#### Example: The Analysis of Globalization

A *quantitative* study of globalization might involve collecting information on the degree to which globalization activities are evident in a particular setting. Researchers might collect statistics on foreign direct investment, the number of strategic alliances with overseas companies, decisions of the World Trade Organization, the use of technology in developing countries, the size and nature of trade flows, or indicators concerning the prevalence of a global pop culture. Such studies would attempt to connect the degree of globalization, as denoted by these quantitative indicators, with particular outcome measures such as profitability, poverty, demographic trends, and so forth. Such research takes the concept of globalization for granted and seeks to ascertain relationships among particular practices and outcomes to draw conclusions about the prevalence or effectiveness of globalization.

*Qualitative* studies of globalization can take a number of forms. For example, an ethnography might involve a researcher living in a small village in a developing country to ascertain the meaning and impact of new Internet connections for villagers; how the presence of multinational companies affects family life; or how global calls for bans on child labor influence economic and social well-being. A researcher could also undertake an ethnographic study of an Indian-based call center, in which he or she observes how employees present themselves—via telephone—to callers from around the world and what this means for the employees of the organization. One could use narrative analysis to uncover the stories that people tell to explain new global practices, using devices such as plot, narrator, and characters to ascertain how they make sense of a new Internet café, an international merger, or the sudden disappearance of an overseas market. One might use conversation analysis to study teenagers in different countries talking among themselves about what MTV means to them and what they consider important about their dress style. One could conduct interviews with key actors in the World Trade Organization or the United Nations to ascertain their views on the North–South



**Box 1.1 (continued)**

divide and compare their comments with the opinions of officials in governments of southern counties. A researcher's political analysis might use unstructured interviews and participant observation to uncover the politics and cultural dislocation involved in a takeover of a local firm by a U.S. multinational corporation and to highlight any actions—covert or overt—by unions, employees, and community members to resist or influence the changes. Such qualitative studies are all, in different ways, interested in the social and political dynamics associated with globalization practices and in what those practices mean to individuals who are affected by them. These researchers are interested in the meaning, rather than the “facts,” of globalization, but they still take the concept of globalization as “given.”

*Discourse analysis* is interested in how the concept of globalization came about—why it has a particular meaning today when, 60 years ago, it had none. Researchers might explore how globalization discourse draws from and influences other discourses—such as free trade discourse and liberalism, discourse around new technology, poverty and democracy, and even health and terrorism—and how it is constructed through diverse texts that range from academic articles to CNN newscasts. They might then investigate how this broad discourse of globalization gives meaning and substance to disjointed and contradictory patterns of economic, social, geographic, and cultural activities. At the local level, researchers might explore how the discourse of globalization makes certain practices possible or inevitable—such as the business operations of multinational companies, restrictions on refugees, or trade patterns between countries—and how it empowers and disempowers different identities. They may also investigate how particular actors draw on the globalization discourse to legitimate their positions and actions. In exploring different texts pertaining to globalization and relating them to the broader economic, social, and political context, as well as to more specific practices, discourse analysts are able to draw conclusions that undermine the very notion of globalization, showing how it is neither inevitable nor complete but, in fact, a confluence of discourses, texts, and practices that make up a particular reality.

**Table 1.1** Diversity in Data and Traditions of Discourse Analysis

<i>Examples of Data in Discourse Analysis</i>	<i>Examples of Traditions in Discourse Analysis</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Documents and records</li> <li>• Naturally occurring conversations</li> <li>• Political speeches</li> <li>• Newspaper articles</li> <li>• Cartoons</li> <li>• Novels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversation analysis</li> <li>• Foucauldian research</li> <li>• Critical discourse analysis</li> <li>• Critical linguistics</li> <li>• Discursive psychology</li> <li>• Bakhtinian research</li> <li>• Interactional linguistics</li> <li>• Ethnography of speaking</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Adapted from Wetherell, M. (2001). Debates in discourse research. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, and S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse theory and practice: A reader* (p. 38). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

It is important to note, however, that some traditional qualitative approaches do lend themselves to discourse analysis. For example, conversation analysis and narrative analysis can be used to connect “microevents” to broader discourses as a way to show how narratives and conversations construct social experience (e.g., O’Connor, 1995; Stokoe, 1998; van Dijk, 1993). Similarly, ethnographies have been an important component of discourse analytic studies in showing how discourses are enacted in particular practices (e.g., Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Sajay, 1998; Fletcher, 1998; Jackall, 1988; Orr, 1996). Content analysis, not in terms of a mechanistic counting but in a more interpretive form, can be used to connect textual content to broader discursive contexts. For example, Ellingson (1995) carried out a content analysis of newspaper articles and editorials by identifying themes and rhetorical strategies and connecting them to the speaker and the audience; Holmes (1998) conducted a content analysis of women’s language use by linking it to power and status. Although the philosophy underpinning discourse analysis differentiates it from other forms of analysis, when it comes to actual studies, the boundaries between discourse analysis and other qualitative methods are sometimes blurred. Researchers have consequently employed a range of interpretive techniques—from microanalyses of individual utterances to macroanalyses of a corpus of texts—to undertake discourse analysis and, as Table 1.1 shows, they have borrowed from traditional qualitative methods to do so.

What makes a research technique discursive is not the method itself but the *use* of that method to carry out an interpretive analysis of some form of text with a view to providing an understanding of discourse and its role in constituting social reality. To the extent that they are used within a discourse analytic ontology and epistemology, many qualitative techniques can become discourse methods.

One final characteristic of discourse analysis is also worth noting: Discourse analytic methods are unavoidably reflexive because the strong social constructivist epistemology that forms its foundation applies equally to the work of academic researchers. Academic discourse also constitutes a particular reality, and we are continuously challenged to retain a sensitivity to our role in the constitution of categories and frames that produce a reality of a particular sort (see Marcus, 1994). Whereas other approaches tend to take analytic categories for granted and allocate data to them, discourse analysts are interested in the socially constructed nature of the research categories themselves.

Thus the task of discourse analysis is not to apply categories to participants' talk, but rather to identify the ways in which participants themselves actively construct and employ categories in their talks. Further, all categorization is provisional; analysis requires constant reflexive attention to the process of categorization of both the participant and the analyst. (Wood & Kroger, 2000, pp. 29–30)

Even grounded theory, although it seeks to generate categories from empirical findings, does not problematize them in the way that discourse analysis does. It accepts the researcher's "reading" of the data (subject to carrying out the necessary research protocols). Discourse analysts, on the other hand, are attuned to the co-construction of the theoretical categories at multiple levels, including researcher, research subject, academic community, and even society, and they attempt to design and present their research in ways that acknowledge these complex relationships (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Clegg & Hardy, 1996a; Hardy, Phillips, & Clegg, 2001).

The need to link text, context, and discourse, and to incorporate a highly subjective and reflexive use of research methods, poses a major challenge for researchers: How do we cope with all this complexity? We can never study all aspects of discourse, and we inevitably have to select a subset of texts for the purpose of manageability. Nonetheless, as discourse analysts we must still make reference to broader discourses, acknowledge the

location of individual texts in larger bodies of texts, and pay some attention to three-dimensionality. We are also faced with the prospects of learning by doing as we employ a particular analytical technique, interpreting meanings as we go along and giving voice to multiple meanings. And, having incorporated all this into our study, we have to explain our work within the confines of the normal avenues and arenas of academic publication. It is this complexity and ambiguity that makes discourse analysis such a challenge—and also one of the reasons why we wrote this book, although by this stage, the reader may be left thinking, why bother with discourse analysis at all?

### Reasons for Using Discourse Analysis

In this section, we discuss some of the reasons for using discourse analysis. Given the plethora of other more established methodologies and the difficulties noted above in doing discourse analysis, why should anyone consider using this methodology for his or her empirical research? The reasons *not* to adopt a discourse analytic approach are obvious. First, any new method requires substantial investments of time and energy to master. Discourse analysis is certainly no exception to this rule, especially with the relative shortage of methodological writings and established exemplars to guide newcomers to the field. Second, and even more important, by definition new methods are not institutionalized. Researchers therefore face substantial barriers as they attempt to publish or present work that their colleagues find unfamiliar and that can be difficult to relate to existing work in the field. Researchers who adopt the method face additional risks when their work is evaluated for tenure or promotion because the relative rarity of discourse analytic studies makes their evaluation difficult, and unfamiliar reviewers may not appreciate their value. Third, discourse analysis is a labor-intensive and time-consuming method of analysis. Given the ever-ticking tenure clock and pervasive "publish or perish" culture in academia, there are easier and quicker alternatives for carrying out research.

Despite these problems, we believe that there are many good reasons why discourse analysis has an important role to play in the future of social science. These reasons outweigh the disadvantages of adopting a new and relatively unproven research method and, at a personal level, they have convinced us to use discourse analysis in our own research and led us to write this book to assist others who might want to use the method.

In the remainder of this section, we outline five reasons why researchers should consider using discourse analysis. Some of these reasons are specific to discourse analysis and theory itself, whereas others reflect the changing nature of our particular field of study—organization and management theory. The changing nature of the “organization” has resulted in a growing need to find new ways of studying old topics, as well as effective approaches to studying new topics. At this point, it is worth adding a small disclaimer. Although we have written this book to be as general as possible, and although we feel that the problems and solutions we discuss relate to a number of disciplines, many of our examples are organizational in nature. Yet insofar as organizational studies involves the study of individuals and societies, as well as organizations, the motivation behind the use of discourse analysis in our field is not dissimilar to the reasons driving discourse analysis in other fields.

### The “Linguistic Turn”

Over the last 30 years, a revolution of sorts has swept across the humanities and social sciences. Beginning with the work of linguistic philosophers such as Wittgenstein (1967) and Winch (1958), the idea that language is much more than a simple reflection of reality—that, in fact, it is *constitutive* of social reality—has become commonly accepted. This early work heavily influenced sociologists such as Berger and Luckmann (1967) and anthropologists such as Geertz (1973), whose work formed the foundation of a constructionist view of social phenomena. This view has permeated the social sciences and become well accepted as many disciplines are, in Gergen’s (1999, p. 16) terms, “pulsing toward the postmodern” and wrestling with crises of representation and legitimation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Rosenau, 1992).

The recognition of the constructive role of language problematizes the very nature of research as the objectivity, neutrality, and independence of the researcher are called into question, as the nature of what passes for truth and knowledge is scrutinized, and as the question of how things work is replaced by questions about what things *mean* (Winch, 1958). The social sciences are not only about counting—defining and measuring variables and the relationships between them—they are also about interpreting what social relationships signify, to which a long history of qualitative research bears witness. With the linguistic turn, however, the demands of interpretative research are multiplied. As researchers, we are no longer interested

simply in what the social world means to the subjects who populate it; we are interested in how and why the social world comes to have the meanings that it does. We are also interested in how we, as researchers, are implicated in that process (Clegg & Hardy, 1996a; Hardy et al., 2001). Discourse analysis, as one method for studying these more reflexive processes of social construction, is therefore attracting increasing attention (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a).

As the linguistic turn has swept through disciplines, researchers have turned to discourse analysis to study its implications for empirical research. Although somewhat late in adopting this view compared with the humanities and other areas of social science, researchers in organization and management theory are also beginning to see language as increasingly important (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a).<sup>1</sup> The idea that organizations are socially constructed and exist primarily in language (broadly defined) is becoming widely accepted. As a result, researchers are increasingly open to and interested in finding new ways to examine these processes. Discourse analysis provides such a methodology because it is grounded in an explicitly constructionist epistemology that sees language as constitutive and constructive rather than reflective and representative (Wood & Kroger, 2000).

### New and Reconceptualized Topics of Study

Broader changes in society have led to the emergence of new topics for study, which has reinforced the role of discourse analysis as a viable and useful research methodology. For example, the natural environment, globalization, and cultural studies have, relatively recently, captured the interest of researchers in a number of disciplines who have made effective use of discourse analysis. Within the narrower confines of organization and management theory, the study of emotion (e.g., Fineman, 1996; Mumby & Putnam, 1992) is one example of a relatively new area in which discursive approaches have been applied to great effect. New topics of study raise new challenges for researchers by creating new categories and drawing our attention to how boundaries are constructed and held in place. Traditional qualitative approaches may provide insight into the nature of these categories, whereas quantitative research often allows generalizable claims to be made about the relations between categories but neither helps us to understand how these categories came to be nor what holds them in place. In fact, traditional methodologies often reify categories, making them seem natural and enduring. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, provides a

way of analyzing the dynamics of social construction that produce these categories and hold the boundaries around them in place.

Other subjects have been reconceptualized by researchers and now require completely different approaches from those used in previous work. For example, identity has long been a subject of study in a number of disciplines, but primarily from an orientation in which researchers attempt to reveal or understand an individual's "true" or essential identity (see Nkomo & Cox, 1996). More recently, discursive approaches are gaining ground in such disciplines as psychology (e.g., Condor & Antaki, 1997; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), gender studies (e.g., Tannen, 1994), organization and management theory (e.g., Calás & Smircich, 1991; Mumby & Stohl, 1991; Wilson, 1996), and social movement theory (e.g., Gamson, 1995) because of the insights provided by an understanding of how identities are constructed on a continuous, interactive, discursive basis.

### The Revitalization of Critical Management Studies

An important reason for the growing appeal of discourse analysis in organization and management theory derives from the renewed interest in critical management studies. Critiques of managerialism have a long-standing tradition in organization and management theory as a result of early Marxist traditions and more radical readings of Weber (Hardy & Clegg, 1996). They appear in a variety of theoretical streams such as labor process theory (e.g., Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1979), work on power (e.g., Benton 1981; Clegg, 1975; Hardy, 1985; Lukes, 1974), and studies of culture and ideology (e.g., Smircich, 1983; Weiss and Miller, 1987; Willmott, 1993), to name but a few. The advent of postmodernism in organization and management theory initially challenged this line of thinking (e.g., Burrell, 1988; Cooper & Burrell, 1988). Over time, however, the integration of postmodern and poststructuralist insights has reinvigorated critical management studies and attracted a number of researchers to what is a revitalized agenda in critical management studies (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Alvesson & Willmott, 1992a, 1992b; Fournier & Grey, 2000).<sup>2</sup>

Much of the renewed research attention has focused on the intersection between critical and postmodern theory (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996; Mumby, 1992) and, specifically, on the connection between power and meaning—the way in which knowledge is bound up in the dynamics of power (e.g., Knights & Morgan, 1991). Building particularly on the work of

Foucault, researchers have become interested in how processes of social construction lead to a social reality that is taken for granted and that advantages some participants at the expense of others (e.g., Clegg, 1989). At the same time, researchers have sought to examine these political dynamics without falling into the critical trap of "standing outside" the power relations they are studying (Hardy & Clegg, 1996). These new challenges facing critical management studies have created a need for new methods that expose the dynamics on which power distributions in organizations—and in research—depend.

This new and renewed concern with power has not only been confined to organization and management theory. Researchers in areas such as social movement theory, communications, psychology, and gender studies are also increasingly attuned to the dynamics of power. As a result, there are significant opportunities for the application of such methods as critical discourse analysis and critical linguistic analysis (Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Mumby, 2000; Mumby & Stohl, 1991; Parker, 1992) to a variety of settings, in addition to those related to organizations.

### The Development of Postbureaucratic Organizational Forms

Another reason specific to the increased use of discourse analysis in organization and management theory is the changing nature of organizational and management practice over the last few decades. In reflecting on the last 30 years of organization and management theory, Clegg and Hardy (1996b, p. 2) noted that in the 1960s, "hierarchies were the norm, personal computers had not been invented, and the only mode of instantaneous communication was the telephone. The new technologies that were to challenge radically accepted organization designs seemed unthinkable." Today, we witness an array of new organizational forms; the widespread acceptance of new information technologies; the increasing globalization of business, trade, and culture, as well as resistance to it; and the increasing importance of knowledge- and symbol-intensive firms.

These changes in practice have led to a growing need to study the more ephemeral aspects of organizations. It is increasingly difficult to study organizations as if they were solid, fixed material objects when we are aware of their fluid and contradictory dynamics. As a result, we search for the stories, narratives, and symbols—the discourses—that hold together these contradictory flows and make them "real" for us (Chia, 2000). Discourse analysis provides a powerful way to study these slippery, ephemeral phenomena

and, as such, is vital if we are to inform and be informed by organizational and management practice.

### The Limits of Traditional Methods and Theories

The final reason we believe that discourse analysis is important grows out of the increasing calls for pluralism that can be heard across the social sciences (e.g., Kaghan & Phillips, 1998). The idea of "one best method" has been challenged more and more frequently; in fact, it has largely been replaced by the idea that research is best served by a plurality of methods and theories (Clegg & Hardy, 1996b). Many researchers have begun to find traditional approaches to research too limiting and repetitive. Rather than using the same method to study the same phenomenon more intensively, the use of a very different method can provide far more insight (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). Using a nontraditional method provides a way to see things that have been obscured by the repeated application of traditional methods—all ways of seeing are also ways of *not* seeing. Using a discursive approach can allow researchers to build on and complement other bodies of theoretical work by introducing new ideas, new concepts, and new challenges. There is also the fact that it can be more interesting to use less traditional methods to study the world of organizations. They are, by definition, less institutionalized, which allows researchers to use more creativity in their application and more innovation in their interpretation.

In summary, we see discourse analysis as an important contribution to increasing plurality in research, a way to incorporate the linguistic turn and to study new phenomena and practices, as well as to reinvigorate agendas of critical theory. It may pose problems, and old certainties may well disappear but, as Clegg and Hardy (1996b, p. 8) pointed out, "It is in the struggle between different approaches that we learn, and from the diversity and ambiguity of meaning; not through the recitation of a presumed uniformity, consensus, and unity, given in a way that requires unquestioning acceptance."

### What Lies Ahead

This book sets out to help aspiring discourse analysts in four ways. First, we provide a coherent framework for understanding the different forms of discourse analysis that currently appear in the literature. Second, we present a wide range of empirical studies that have been conducted across

a range of literatures and show some of the different ways in which discourse analysis can be used. Third, we have used the writing of this book to reflect in some depth on our own work and identify a number of challenges that researchers face as they adopt this method. Finally, we hope to offer some suggestions, based on our own experiences, of how to tackle these challenges.

The remainder of this book is organized in the following way. In Chapter 2, we provide a framework for understanding the different forms of discourse analysis that currently appear in the literature in a variety of disciplines. We begin by focusing on the theoretical assumptions underlying different approaches to discourse analysis and then discuss some of the range of empirical topics that have been explored using discourse analysis. Our intention in Chapter 2 is to provide the reader with a frame for understanding approaches to discourse and an appreciation of the range of potential topics that can be studied using discourse analysis. In Chapter 3, we introduce the reader to our own work in this area. We outline a number of studies we have conducted and explain the types of choices we made in terms of data, data analysis, and general theoretical orientation. We also discuss the contributions that discourse analysis made to our understanding of the phenomena that we studied. In Chapter 4, we explore the question of how to do discourse analysis. Drawing on our experience in carrying out the research program outlined in preceding chapters, we identify some of the key challenges facing researchers embarking on a research project and discuss some of the ways in which they might be addressed. In our final chapter, we sum up our current thoughts on discourse analysis as a field and point to some of the major hurdles that we still need to clear.

### Notes

1. The degree to which social constructivism is accepted in organization and management theory varies geographically. In Europe, few researchers would have difficulty with the basic premises of social constructivism. In North America, it is less accepted, although this is changing rapidly.
2. For example, critical management studies has been established as an integral part of the preconference professional development workshops at the Academy of Management in the United States, and plans exist to apply for interest group status. In the United Kingdom, the first critical management studies conference was held in 1999.

## 2. THE VARIETY OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The definition of discourse analysis presented in the previous chapter was purposefully broad and inclusive. We chose this definition to encompass as many as possible of the different approaches that are referred to as discourse analysis across the social science literature. Our intention was to point to the common ground that makes them all forms of discourse analysis and to distinguish discourse analysis from other forms of social inquiry. In this chapter, we take the opposite tack and focus on the differences among various forms of discourse analysis in terms of their underlying theoretical assumptions and the empirical focus of the research.<sup>1</sup> In this way, we hope to help readers make sense of what is a complex, diverse, and growing field of study.

We begin with an examination of the different theoretical assumptions that underpin empirical work in discourse analysis and that produce quite different styles of research. We present a framework that categorizes these differences according to two key dimensions: the degree to which the emphasis is on individual texts or on the surrounding context and the degree to which the research focuses on power and ideology as opposed to processes of social construction. This framework provides a tool for understanding the diversity of theoretical approaches and for sensitizing researchers to the important epistemological and methodological characteristics of different styles of discourse analysis. As we will show in Chapter 4, understanding the underlying assumptions of different research approaches is important if researchers are to plan and conduct their empirical work successfully.

In the latter part of the chapter, we examine some of the empirical applications that appear in the literature. We feel that more empirical work is needed to complement the theoretical developments that have been made in this area and to use discourse analysis to derive greater insight into a variety of social phenomena. To accomplish this goal, we can build on the existing empirical studies that have been carried out using discourse analysis. By reviewing some of these studies (the coverage here is meant to be illustrative not exhaustive), we can draw attention to the potential of discourse analysis to explore a range of subjects. In addition, we use particular studies as exemplars of particular research orientations that readers may care to consult as models for their own work.

## Theoretical Perspectives in Discourse Analysis

There are many approaches that comprise discourse analysis, and one challenge, particular for newcomers to the field, is to make sense of this diversity. In analyzing a series of empirical studies of discourse analysis, Phillips and Ravasi (1998) found that they could be categorized along two key theoretical dimensions. The first dimension concerns the relative importance of text versus context in the research. The second dimension concerns the degree to which power dynamics form the focus of the research—more critical studies—versus studies that focus more closely on the processes of social construction that constitute social reality—more constructivist studies. Figure 2.1 combines these two dimensions, which are described in more detail below, to identify four main perspectives in discourse analysis.

The vertical axis in Figure 2.1 shows the continuum between *text* and *context*. This continuum may seem surprising given our discussion in the last chapter emphasizing the importance of seeing discourse as being constituted by multiple texts in a particular social and historical context. Demands for three-dimensional research suggest that researchers should include text *and* context in their studies and consider discourse “as a constitutive part of its local and global, social and cultural contexts” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 29). Although this represents an important theoretical ideal, conducting empirical research is another matter as researchers are forced to make choices about the data they select—no researcher can study everything. Whereas the local context of the texts being studied is always relevant (Wetherell, 2001, p. 387), the broader social context can be more or less included depending on the interests and motivations of the researcher. Drawing on the work of Schegloff (1992), Wetherell (2001, p. 388) made a useful distinction between distal and proximate contexts. The distal context “includes things like social class, the ethnic composition of the participants, the institutions or sites where discourse occurs, and the ecological, regional, and cultural settings.” The proximate context, on the other hand, refers to the immediate features of the interaction including “the sort of occasion or genre of interaction the participants take an episode to be (e.g., a consultation, an interrogation, a family meal-time), the sequences of talk in which particular events occur and the capacities in which people speak (as initiator or instructor or respondent)” (Wetherell, 2001, p. 338). Whereas the proximate context is always incorporated

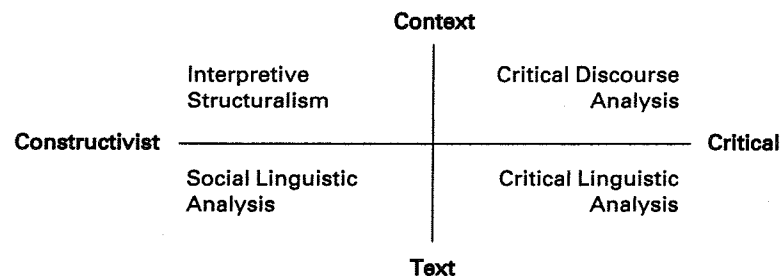


Figure 2.1 Different Approaches to Discourse Analysis

in one way or another, the distal context can be more or less included in the analysis depending on practicality and theoretical orientation. Consequently, empirical studies tend to focus more closely on either the broad social context or on a particular piece of text (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b; Burman & Parker, 1993; Keenoy, Oswick, & Grant, 1997). Some studies will focus on the microanalysis of particular texts; others will conduct a broader sweep of the discursive elements of particular contexts; and, because this is a continuum not a dichotomy, some studies combine elements of both.

The horizontal axis of Figure 2.1 reflects the choice between *constructivist* approaches that produce fine-grained explorations of the way in which a particular social reality has been constructed, and *critical* approaches, which focus more explicitly on the dynamics of power, knowledge, and ideology that surround discursive processes. Once again, this is a matter of degree because good constructivist studies are sensitive to power, whereas critical studies include a concern for the processes of social construction that underlie the phenomenon of interest. The important question is to what degree do studies focus directly on the dynamics of power—"the relation of language to power and privilege" (Riggins, 1997, p. 2)—as opposed to focusing more directly on the processes of social construction that constitute social reality.

Critical studies are relatively common in discourse analysis. In part, this is due to the influence of Foucault's work, which has led to a body of research on the disciplinary effects of discourse and the relationship between power and knowledge. In addition, the role of discourse theory in

reinvigorating critical research agendas, as discussed in Chapter 1, has also led to the development of critically informed empirical work. Critical studies encompass quite different orientations. Foucauldian-informed work often focuses on unmasking the privileges inherent in particular discourses and emphasizes its constraining effects, often leading to studies of how grand or "mega" discourses shape social reality and constrain actors (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b). Some researchers reject the notion that there is nothing beyond discourse and, instead, have tried to reassert the idea of a social structure that can empower, as well as disempower, particular actors (e.g., Morgan & Sturdy, 2000). Other researchers have focused more explicitly on the ability of actors to use discourse as a resource to bring about certain outcomes (e.g., Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 2000; Jackson, 2000; Phillips & Hardy, 1997).

Not all empirical work is so directly interested in power, however, and many studies explore the constructive effects of discourse without explicitly focusing on the political dynamics. Important bodies of work in disciplines such as sociology (e.g., Gergen, 1991) or psychology (e.g., Harré, 1995; Parker, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) have led to empirical work that is more interested in developing an understanding of constructive processes than power and politics per se. Rather than exploring who benefits or is disadvantaged by a socially constructed "reality," these researchers are more interested in understanding the way in which discourses ensure that certain phenomena are created, reified, and taken for granted and come to constitute that "reality" (e.g., Dunford & Jones, 2000; Hirsch, 1986).

By combining these two axes, we can identify four major perspectives that are adopted in empirical studies<sup>2</sup>: social linguistic analysis, interpretive structuralism, critical discourse analysis, and critical linguistic analysis (Phillips & Ravasi, 1998). It is important to keep in mind that the dimensions of this framework are continua, not simple categories or dichotomies. The endpoints of the axis of the framework represent ideal types in the Weberian sense: Not all research will necessarily fall neatly into a particular category. However, these four categories do allow us to identify quite different styles of empirical research, which not only helps to orient readers in understanding the literature but which, as we discuss in Chapter 4, is useful for planning research studies. In the remainder of the section, we consider the four perspectives in more detail and discuss an example of empirical work that conforms to each.



## Social Linguistic Analysis

Social linguistic analysis is constructivist and text-based. Much of this work examines specific examples of text and talk such as recordings of conversations (e.g., Kleiner, 1998; Mauws, 2000; Stokoe, 1998), interviews (e.g., Dunford & Jones, 2000; Gill, 1993a, 1993b; van Dijk, 1993), participant observation (Hardy, Lawrence, & Phillips, 1998), focus groups (Beech, 2000), and stories (e.g. Witten, 1993). Researchers focus on individual texts, broadly defined, relating them only marginally to the distal context in which they occur or exploring the power dynamics in which they are implicated. The goal of this work is to undertake a close reading of the text to provide insight into its organization and construction, and also to understand how texts work to organize and construct other phenomena. Common approaches to social linguistic analysis include literary analysis (e.g., O'Connor, 1995), rhetorical analysis (e.g., Mauws, 2000), and the micro discourse analysis commonly carried out in social psychology (e.g., Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Mauws (2000) provided an example of social linguistic research. Mauws adopted a discourse analytic approach to explore the construction of decisions by a panel of experts as they judged proposals made to Manitoba Film & Sound Development Corporation by musicians seeking financial assistance in commercializing their music. He chose to use discourse analysis to understand the way in which decisions about the potential of a particular individual or band were made. Rather than studying why these experts made the decisions they did, Mauws was interested in the way in which they discursively constructed their decisions. He did not study what was going on in the heads of jury members as they chose between proposals, why they liked one proposal more than another, or even why one proposal was "better" than another. Instead, he focused on the decision as an organizational artifact that was discursively constructed. In this way, his research differentiated between the act of choosing and the process of decision making. And, as part of the decision-making process, he was interested in the rhetorical strategies that were available to the jury members and the "conditions of possibility" (Foucault, 1972) that were present.

The procedures associated with the funding scheme required the group of experts to meet as a jury and render a unanimous verdict. It was this requirement that turned the act of making an individual aesthetic judgment into the discursive act of constructing a decision and made the process appropriate for discursive analysis. The data in this case were a

set of transcriptions of jury deliberations. Two meetings each of two juries—one pop music jury and one country music—were recorded in their entirety, transcribed, entered into Atlas.ti,<sup>3</sup> and coded for the rhetorical strategies drawn upon by the juries. The coding began with three broad categories drawn from the existing literature: conformance to genre, imitation, and reputation. A fourth category, innovation, was also discovered in the analysis.

The analysis showed important differences between the pop jury and the country jury, which used these rhetorical strategies in different ways. Mauws (2000, p. 241) noted that "a full repertoire of discursive practices is not available at all times to all those who are speaking; in contrast, it is the context in which people are speaking that predisposes them to use some resources while neglecting others." Although acknowledging that the context—in this case, the difference in the constructions of country and pop music—may influence strategies, it played a background role in Mauws's analysis. His focus was on identifying and understanding the discursive moves—the rhetorical strategies—of judges to construct decisions about what constitutes art in popular and country music. Studies of this kind, which focus on the constructive aspects of texts, help us to understand not only the discursive microdynamics of individual decisions but also the discursive foundations of the social reality in which those decisions are located. They are useful in understanding how social phenomena—decisions, organizations, identities—are produced by specific discursive actions and events on the part of particular actors.

## Interpretive Structuralism

Interpretive structuralism focuses on the analysis of the social context and the discourse that supports it. Some studies focus on the discursive production of organizational or societal contexts. For example, O'Connor (2000) studied organizational change in a high-technology research organization through an examination of the narratives used by managers to construct the change as real and necessary. Heracleous and Barrett (2001) studied organizational change in the context of the London Insurance Market using an interpretive structural approach. Other researchers have focused on the broader, institutional context and its evolution through time. Wodak (1991, 1996), for example, studied the constitution of anti-Jewish prejudice in contemporary Austria based on studies of the reporting of particular events in the Austrian press. Ellingson (1995) explored the conflict



between abolitionists and antiabolitionists in antebellum Cincinnati to understand how discourse makes action possible and legitimate based on a study of newspaper articles of the time, as well as other archival material. Although texts may provide some of the data, the description of the context often relies on interviews or archival materials to provide accounts of insiders' interpretations of the context. Even when texts are collected and analyzed, they may be more important as background material because these studies aim at understanding context and on studying data that provide insight into the "bigger picture," rather than a microanalysis of individual texts. As with social linguistic analysis, they are primarily constructivist—concerned with the way in which broader discursive contexts come into being and the possibilities to which they give rise, but without a direct concern with power.

An example of an interpretive structural approach to discourse analysis is Hirsch's (1986) study of hostile takeovers. To understand the changes, from negative to positive, in the social construction of takeovers over time, Hirsch began by collecting data from three major sources. These included articles on takeovers in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune*, and *Business Week* over a 20-year time period; transcripts of congressional reports and hearings and other publications concerning takeovers; and "candid discussions" with 60 executives involved in takeover activities. These texts provided evidence of the development of the discursive activity around takeovers at a broad societal level; the interviews helped to show how the interpretive frames of the managers were shaped by the broader context. Hirsch retraces the history of the construction of hostile takeovers from its early controversial appearance in the mid-1960s to its progressive spread and establishment as an acceptable, and indeed beneficial, practice in the business community. The reconstruction of historical events was followed by an analysis of various texts to investigate the public linguistic framing of takeover activities, which identified a series of recurring metaphors, ranging from the common "white knight" and "corporate raiders" to the more unusual "sex without marriage," "summer soldiers," and "hired guns." Hirsch also observed how the events associated with a hostile takeover were usually represented in terms of scripts drawn from popular culture. Players were "assigned parts, with each instance coded into the appropriate popular genre, utilizing terminology evocative of the violence, adventure, sex, and conflict found in dramas" (Hirsch, p. 815). These terms were then grouped into genre clusters, associated with settings such as the Western, the love affair, marriage,

warfare, mystery and piracy, which varied in the degree of "friendliness" between the parties.

Even though Hirsch did not explicitly refer to his study in such terms, his underlying assumptions about the connections between linguistic framing and social practice allow us to consider his work as a pioneering example of interpretive structural discourse analysis. His findings reveal a number of phases in the discursive construction of takeovers over time to produce an increasingly acceptable, natural, and routine practice. In the earlier period, the linguistic framing of takeovers presented it as an external threat for corporate executives with negative epithets such as "pariah," "pirates," and "raiders." Over time, linguistic frames changed, reflecting as well as driving greater acceptance, until takeovers came to be considered as normal practice—"contests" rather than "conflicts" that were carried out according to the institutionalized normative framework manifested in the "rules of the game" and "good sportsmanship." This analysis of a broad collection of texts over 20 years showed the development of a social discourse that influenced the way members of the business community made sense of, and consequently accepted as legitimate, the emerging practice of takeovers. Interpretive structuralist approaches are thus helpful in understanding macrochanges in broad discourses over periods of time.

### Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis focuses on the role of discursive activity in constituting and sustaining unequal power relations (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Critical discourse analysis "should describe and explain how power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimated by the talk and text of dominant groups and institutions" (van Dijk, 1996, p. 84). Researchers attempt to analyze "dialogical struggle (or struggles) as reflected in the privileging of a particular discourse and the marginalization of others" (Keenoy et al., 1997, p. 150; Mumby & Stohl, 1991). Drawing particularly on the work of Fairclough, this perspective focuses on how discursive activity structures the social space within which actors act, through the constitution of concepts, objects, and subject positions. Critical discourse analysis focuses on the distal context—how it privileges some actors at the expense of others and how broad changes in the discourse result in different constellations of advantage and disadvantage, particularly within the Foucauldian tradition. See, for example, Knights and Morgan's (1991) study of the development and effects of the discourse of strategy. Other studies using critical

discourse analysis adopt a more explicit analysis of how political strategies are shaped by and help to shape this context. For example, Phillips and Hardy's (1997) study of refugee systems showed how certain groups in the refugee system had the right to speak whereas others were silenced and how different groups attempted to draw on discourses that gave them greater rights to speak. Wetherell and Potter (1992) used critical discourse analysis to understand racist discourse in New Zealand and how it functioned to legitimate and explain the political, economic, and social context. Lutz and Collins (1993) also adopted a critical discourse perspective when they studied the role of *National Geographic* in shaping American understandings of non-Western cultures in the United States.

An example of this perspective is Covalleski et al.'s (1998) study of the role of traditional management practices as techniques of social control in professional organizations. The authors were interested in the exercise of, and resistance to, control in the Big Six public accounting firms. The initial purpose was to investigate the involvement of accounting practices and managerial techniques, such as management by objectives (MBO) and mentoring, in the social construction of reality. The authors used an ethnographic field study and drew on Foucault's work to inform data collection and analysis, which allowed them to focus on how disciplinary techniques constituted the identities of one firm's partners and how those identities were resisted.

Data collection was based on 180 in-depth interviews with individuals in different ranks and positions over a period of 15 years. The interviews were aimed at exploring individuals' "lived experience" and "everyday actions and events as they pertained to the exercise of the control and social processes that enabled them to understand and survive in their work environment" (Covalleski et al., 1998, p. 306). Interviews were supplemented by direct observation, archival material, and newspaper coverage of key events in the company. The analysis of these data provided a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the social practices associated with the application of disciplinary techniques, individuals' reactions in terms of compliance or resistance, and implications for the constitution of identity. A broad description of managerial practices and the researchers' interpretation of their discursive function in light of the conceptual framework was presented. Original stories were reported to show that accounts represented people's "interpretations of their own experience" (Covalleski et al., p. 308), providing the "raw material" from which researchers developed their own "provisional" interpretation of the attempt to promote normalization by means of disciplinary techniques such as quantitative measurements.

The use of this approach helped the authors to go beyond the traditional interpretation of control in professional organizations as either residing in bureaucratic practices and procedures or in the internalized norms of a profession. The analysis of discursive practices offered an alternative explanation, according to which control is exercised through technologies—managerial programs—that influence behavior through the constitution of the identity of individuals as manageable and self-serving subjects. Studies conforming to this perspective are thus helpful in revealing the way in which discursive activities help to construct institutions in which power is embedded through the way in which taken-for-granted understandings serve to privilege some actors and disadvantage others. It can also provide insight into the discursive work undertaken by actors in influencing these processes.

### Critical Linguistic Analysis

As with social linguistic analysis, critical linguistic analysis also focuses on individual texts, but with a strong interest in the dynamics of power that surround the text (e.g., Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 2000; Jackson, 2000). It thus shares the concerns of critical discourse analysis but focuses more closely on the microdynamics of texts. Individual pieces of text are examined to understand how the structures of domination in the local or proximate context are implicated in the text. Witten (1993), for example, examined storytelling from a narrative perspective to understand how stories are used to exert covert control in the workplace. O'Connor (1995) used literary analysis and the study of rhetoric, narrative, and metaphor to explore how organizational change programs are implemented. Kleiner (1998) studied rhetorical strategies to understand how racist ideology is reproduced in conversations.

A good example of this approach is the work of Garnsey and Rees (1996), who used techniques from linguistic studies to examine discourse about women's opportunities in business. They revealed how a variety of linguistic strategies were adopted in four texts that were parts of a discourse that represented inequality as being tied to women's education and training. This discourse diverted attention away from substantial obstacles in the wider context, such as the underuse of women's existing qualifications. Garnsey and Rees's approach can be broadly classified as critical linguistic because they examined different rhetorical strategies adopted by actors to provide accounts, to justify, and to make sense of inequalities in an aspect of social reality—in this case, the distribution of and access to

job opportunities. In so doing, these rhetorical strategies contributed to the enactment of inequality and had important political implications.

The authors analyzed four documents pertaining to *Opportunity 2000*, a business-led campaign launched in 1991 in the United Kingdom with government support. The documents included a description of the campaign issued by the promoters and three journal articles referring to the same campaign. These texts were selected because they were considered to represent a "broad spectrum of the ideological positions on the issue of opportunities for women" giving authors "an across and within texts perspective" (Garnsey & Rees, 1996, p. 1046). In focusing intensively on the textual and linguistic dimension of discourse, Garnsey and Rees's study prioritizes text over context in terms of data collection and analysis, although these texts are part of a much broader body of texts related both to equal opportunity and gendered inequality.

The research proceeded in two phases. First, an analysis of the articles revealed discursive themes—such as "goal setting," "training and promotion," and "family-friendly policies"—which served to build a central discourse for women's achievements in companies. This discourse gave "small scope to the acknowledgement of inequalities which stem from common features of social structure" and "little emphasis to proposed remedies" (Garnsey & Rees, 1996, p. 1047). Second, drawing from the work of Barthes and Halliday, Garnsey and Rees explored the linguistic mechanisms and strategies that supported the emerging discourse. The application of the techniques of critical linguistics revealed, for example, a systematic anonymity and an absence of modal verbs. In other words, no subjective viewpoints were present, and the discourse was perceived as objective. The repeated use of passive construction rendered women "passive recipients" of the campaign: Women did not appear or speak anywhere in these texts, and no reference was made to their role or to the initiatives they might take in making known their own needs. The authors concluded that this discourse, as well as the linguistic strategies that supported it, served to reinforce in readers' minds the notion that women were not reaching managerial positions "largely as a result of their own shortcomings" (Garnsey & Rees, p. 1056). In this way, this study provides considerable insight from a detailed microanalysis of texts, using a critical linguistic point of view, into how processes of social construction are bound up with questions of power and domination with regard to women in organizations. Critical linguistics is thus helpful in examining how specific discursive activities and texts help to produce power relations at the local level.

To conclude, the framework shown in Figure 2.1 provides an important tool for understanding the variety of approaches to discourse theory that exist in the literature. Although there are other ways to categorize theoretical approaches, we find this one particularly helpful in understanding the variance in the underlying theoretical perspectives. Even more important, this framework helps researchers to understand their own perspective and design their own studies appropriately, as we discuss further in Chapter 4.

### Empirical Studies in Discourse Analysis

There is more to discourse analysis than just the theoretical perspective adopted by the researcher. There is also the question of the substantive focus of the research. In this section, we provide some tentative answers to the following question: What can be studied from a discourse analysis perspective? We discuss a number of empirical studies that employ discourse analysis, focusing on the phenomena that have been studied, including forms of social control, work and business practices, aspects of identity, as well as issues related to the environment. Our intention is to provide some idea of the range of substantive topics that can be studied, how they can be studied, and what kinds of results can be obtained. Our review is not exhaustive but, rather, indicative of the potential of the method. We feel that such a discussion provides useful insight into what an empirical study actually entails and provides researchers with a useful set of exemplars to think through their own studies.

### Social Control

Modes and techniques of social control are a particularly important focus of study, especially in critical discourse analysis and critical linguistic analysis. In organization and management theory, a critical discourse analytic perspective has been proposed as a way to analyze the practices and techniques that produce and reproduce power relationships within organizations (e.g., Clegg, 1987; Townley, 1993). Critical theorists have argued that the study of the discursive construction of identities and relations can offer a valuable alternative to traditional approaches to the analysis of power and control in organizations. Mumby (1993), for example, argued that stories and other narrative genres contribute to the construction of the social reality that constitutes the lived world of social actors. By portraying

and conveying identities, stories help to “linguistically objectify” a social order. Some patterns of interpretation and action are presented as more appropriate, natural, and legitimate than others (Witten, 1993). Empirical examples of this approach include the study of family stories as a discursive practice of social control (Langellier & Peterson, 1993), storytelling as a way to exercise covert control in the workplace (Witten, 1993), and the way in which client service discourse renders managerial controls invisible (Anderson-Gough et al., 2000).

### Studies of Work

The nature of work has also been a focus of several influential studies that fit our definition of discourse analysis. Orr (1996), for example, studied the “practice of experienced technicians maintaining photocopiers for a major US corporation and finds their practice to be a continuous, highly skilled improvisation within a triangular relationship of technician, customer, and machine” (p. 1). Orr focused on the production of narratives by the technicians that made sense of the complex problems encountered as the technicians struggled to keep the machines working and the customers satisfied. Similarly, Jackall (1988) studied the efforts of executives to make sense of the complex and conflictual environment of top management. His study focused particularly on the executives’ work to make sense of the ethical dilemmas they faced. Jackall studied their production of narratives to explain and interpret their context and actions. He adopted a critical perspective and focused on the dynamics of power that surround the production of these narratives.

### Business Practice

Organizational researchers have investigated more specific aspects of business practice from a discourse analytic approach. Managerial techniques such as Total Quality Management (De Cock, 1998; Zbaracki, 1998) and accounting conventions (Hoskins & Maeve, 1987), in addition to broader discourses around strategy (Knights & Morgan, 1991) and organizational change (Morgan & Sturdy, 2000; Sillince, 1999), have been studied. Examples include O’Connor’s (1995) study of retrospective accounts of a change process in a large corporation, which reveals how narrative choices advanced a concept and practice of change that promoted the interests of particular employees. Researchers have also investigated how

business practices become embedded in broader discourses and reflect the distribution of power and interests more broadly across industries and even society (e.g., Knights & Morgan, 1991). Covaleski et al.’s (1998) study discussed above examines business practices such as Management by Objectives (MBO) and mentoring and shows how they exert control over employees. Such studies suggest that the spread of popular management practices, far from being related to their “natural” or “intrinsic” efficiency and rationality, is actually the result of processes of social construction, influenced and shaped by particular actors. Studies adopting a more explicit focus link these activities to attempts by these actors to legitimate their interests and exercise power.

### Discourses of Difference

Many studies have focused on discourses of difference (Wodak, 1996) to explore particular social identities, such as gender, age, and ethnicity. Feminist studies have applied discursive approaches to analyze the construction of occupational gender identity at societal (Garnsey & Rees, 1996; Maile, 1995), organizational (Fletcher, 1998), and individual levels (Gill, 1993a, 1993b; Stokoe, 1998). Another field of application of discourse analysis has been the study of ethnicity and racism. Potter and Wetherell (1987), for example, discussed how “other” ethnicities are constructed to justify racist attitudes. Similarly, van Dijk (1993) showed how narrative analysis—meant as an interpretive deconstruction of stories or retrospective accounts—reveals insight into the construction of ethnicity and race. According to van Dijk, “stories about minorities generally function as complaints by majority group members or as expressions of negative experiences or prejudices about minorities” (p. 125). Although they are essentially expressions of a group’s experiences and evaluation, they are presented as “facts” that contribute to the discursive reproduction of racism. Similarly, Kleiner (1998) examined the reproduction of racist discourse through “pseudo-argument” in the talk of undergraduate students. In a related vein, Lutz and Collins (1993) studied the representation of non-Western cultures in *National Geographic* and the role they play in constructing Americans’ understandings of these cultures and their relation to them. Ainsworth (2001) examined how the identity of “mature workers” has been constructed in the public policy forum in Australia, including how gender and age identities interact. This study illustrates how

discourse analysis can contribute to an understanding of the fundamentally gendered nature of social constructions of aging as well as its implications for public policy.

### Identity Production

A discourse analytic approach has been the investigation of the production of individual and collective identities within organizational settings. Such research suggests how dominating and emerging discourses in organizations and societies provide a repertoire of concepts, which can be used strategically by members of the community to influence the social construction of identities and to support the institutionalization of practices and patterns of resource distribution (du Gay, 1996). Examples of this field of application range from social identity (e.g., Phillips & Hardy, 1997), occupational identity (e.g., Watson & Bargiela-Chiappina, 1998), corporate identity (e.g., Salzer-Mörling, 1998), and individual identity (e.g., Holmer-Nadeson, 1996). This work investigates the process through which identities are constructed in the interplay of different actors, employing different discursive strategies and resources to establish a definition of identity coherent with particular interests and goals.

### The Environment

Environmental studies—both natural and social—is another field of research where the application of discourse analysis offers a significant contribution. The creation of new concepts, such as toxic waste and endangered species, has led to new understandings of the relationship of business and the environment. Environmental discourse is also an important part of the recent development of an anticapitalism discourse and has led to a strong oppositional discourse to the dominant—and usually positive—globalization discourse. For example, Spicer's (2000) empirical study shows globalization to be a series of contradictory and incomplete economic, cultural geographic, and political "flows." The discourse of globalization fixes the meaning of a loosely related series of shifts in the patterns of social life. Globalization "does not merely describe the world as its advocates seem to pretend, but . . . articulates or reconfigures relations of economic and political power globally" (Dirlik, 1999, p. 39). By exploring historical and organizational texts, Spicer hopes to show how globalization creates particular understandings of the environment in which

organizations operate that, in turn, define a series of possibilities and impossibilities with organizational consequences.

Macnaghten (1993) conducted a study on the discursive struggle over the natural environment by examining the construction of the concept of "nature" in a public inquiry. By examining written accounts from a public inquiry concerning a planning application for a landfill site, the author identified a variety of different "discourses of nature" used by the disputants to sustain their arguments and to influence the outcome of the inquiry. In so doing, nature is viewed as socially constructed. Similarly, Welcomer, Gioia, and Kilduff (2000, p. 1175) studied the "clashing discourse between modernity's champions and its skeptics" in the case of a proposal to locate a hazardous waste site in a rural part of Pennsylvania, using participant observation and public documents, such as newspaper articles.

Table 2.1 provides a summary of some of the studies mentioned in this discussion. Our aim is to show some of the phenomena that have been studied using discourse analysis, as well as highlighting diversity in data collection and analysis, and to show where these phenomena are located in terms of the theoretical framework described at the beginning of the chapter.

### A Useful Methodology

In reviewing the literature to prepare to write this chapter, we made three observations. First, we were struck by the variety of theoretical assumptions that empirical studies of discourse analysis can sustain. The idea that collections of texts act to construct the social world provides a surprisingly robust foundation that can support a range of research approaches, as Figure 2.1 demonstrates. Second, this flexibility is even more evident in the discussion of the scope of empirical topics to which discourse analytic methods have been applied. Although there remains scope to develop discourse analysis further, there is already a broad diversity of applications where a discourse perspective has contributed significantly to our understanding of a series of substantive topics such as gender, race, and power. Our review of a selection of these studies highlights this diversity. Finally, we were impressed by the potential of discourse analysis to provide complementary insights to traditional qualitative approaches and to contribute significantly to our understanding to a broad range of organizational, interorganizational, and societal phenomena.

**Table 2.1** Selected Examples of Empirical Discourse Analysis

<i>Study</i>	<i>Object of analysis</i>	<i>Source of data</i>	<i>Method of analysis</i>	<i>Approach</i>
Langellier, K. M., & Peterson, E. E. (1993). Family storytelling as a strategy of social control. In D. Mumby (Ed.), <i>Narrative and social control: Critical perspectives</i> (pp. 49–76). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.	Social control	Stories	Narrative analysis	Critical linguistic analysis
Ellingson, S. (1995). Understanding the dialectic of discourse and collective action: Public debate and rioting in antebellum Cincinnati. <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> , 101, 100–144.	Abolitionism	Archival	Content analysis	Interpretive structuralism
Knights, D., & Morgan, G. (1991). "Corporate strategy, organizations, and subjectivity: A critique." <i>Organization Studies</i> , 12, 251–273.	Business practice —strategy	Archival (history)	Genealogy	Critical discourse analysis

<i>Study</i>	<i>Object of analysis</i>	<i>Source of data</i>	<i>Method of analysis</i>	<i>Approach</i>
Covalesski et al. (1998). The calculated and the avowed: Techniques of discipline and struggles over identity in the Big Six public accounting firms. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> , 43, 293–327.	Business practice —MBO	Ethnography, interviews, direct observation	Ethnography	Critical discourse analysis
O'Connor, E. (1995). Paradoxes of participation: Textual analysis and organizational change. <i>Organization Studies</i> , 16, 769–803.	Business practice—organizational change	Written accounts of a change process	Literary analysis (rhetoric, narrative, and metaphor)	Social linguistic analysis
Watson, T. J., & Bargiela-Chiappina, F. (1998). Managerial sensemaking and occupational identities in Britain and Italy: The role of management magazines in the process of discursive construction. <i>Journal of Management Studies</i> , 35, 285–301.	Identity—occupational	Issues of business magazines	Content and linguistic analysis	Social linguistic analysis

(Continued)

Table 2.1 (Continued)

<i>Study</i>	<i>Object of analysis</i>	<i>Source of data</i>	<i>Method of analysis</i>	<i>Approach</i>
Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1992). <i>Mapping the language of racism: Discourse and the legitimation of exploitation</i> . New York: Harvester.	Racism	Interviews	Conversational analysis	Critical linguistic analysis
Lutz, C., & Collins, J. (1993). <i>Reading National Geographic</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press.	Identity—non-Western cultures	Issues of <i>National Geographic</i> , archival data, interviews	Photographic analysis	Critical discourse analysis
Salzer-Mörling, M. (1998). As God created the earth: A saga that makes sense? In D. Grant, T. Keenoy, & C. Oswick (Eds.), <i>Discourse and organization</i> (pp. 104–118). London: Sage.	Identity—corporate	Written and oral accounts of a corporate saga	Narrative analysis	Critical linguistic analysis

<i>Study</i>	<i>Object of analysis</i>	<i>Source of data</i>	<i>Method of analysis</i>	<i>Approach</i>
Gill, R. (1993a). Justifying injustice: Broadcasters account of inequality in radio. In I. Parker & E. Burman (Eds.), <i>Discourse analytic research</i> (pp. 75–93). London: Routledge.	Gender	Interviews	Content and linguistic analysis	Social linguistic analysis
Maile, S. (1995). The gendered nature of managerial discourse: The case of a local authority. <i>Gender, Work, and Organization</i> , 2, 76–87.	Gender	Archival documentation; interviews	Institutional analysis	Interpretive structuralism
Fletcher, J. K. (1998). Relational practice. A feminist reconstruction of work. <i>Journal of Management Inquiry</i> , 7, 163–186.	Gender	Ethnographic study; interviews	Ethnography	Critical discourse analysis

(Continued)

Table 2.1 (Continued)

Study	Object of analysis	Source of data	Method of analysis	Approach
van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Stories and racism. In D. Mumby (Ed.), <i>Narrative and social control</i> (pp. 121-142). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.	Ethnicity	Stories	Narrative analysis	Critical linguistic analysis
Macnaghten, P. (1993). Discourses of nature: Argumentation and power. In I. Parker & E. Burman (Eds.), <i>Discourse analytic research</i> (pp. 52-72). London: Routledge.	Environment	Accounts from a public inquiry	Content analysis	Social linguistic analysis

## Notes

1. We are indebted to Davide Ravasi for his contribution to this chapter. Much of the material presented here is based on an earlier paper that he coauthored with one of the authors (see Phillips & Ravasi, 1998).
2. For an alternative categorization, see Putnam and Fairhurst (2000).
3. Atlas.ti is one of the many qualitative data-analysis packages currently available.

## 3. OUR RESEARCH PROGRAM

In the last two chapters, we talked generally about discourse analysis and its applications. Our goal was to introduce the general philosophy of discourse analysis and to provide an overview of the range of applications that appear in the current literature. In this chapter, we move closer to home to discuss our own work and to explain why we have adopted a discourse analytic methodology. Focusing on our own work has the advantage of allowing us to go much deeper into the process of conducting discourse analysis and to include many details that show how it was used and what it contributed. In this chapter, we explain why we began using a discourse analytic methodology and show how the methodology contributed to our understanding of various research questions. In the next chapter, we go deeper into the practicalities of discourse analysis when we use our work to discuss the steps to be taken in designing and conducting a discourse analytic research project.

We have been engaged in a series of discourse studies in a variety of settings, including (a) refugee systems in Canada, Denmark, and the United Kingdom; (b) the whale-watching industry in British Columbia; (c) the Canadian HIV/AIDS treatment domain; (d) an aid organization operating in the West Bank and Gaza; and (e) employment service organizations in western Canada (see Table 3.1 for details of individual studies). This program of research is an offshoot of an earlier research project involving a critical study of interorganizational collaboration. In the earlier research, we were interested in the role that power played in creating and shaping collaborations and in how the effects of collaboration, often presented in the organizational and management literature as a "good" thing, were often intensely political and highly disadvantageous for some participants. Furthermore, as we explored the political aspects of collaboration, it