

3 Four examples of discourse analysis

The previous chapters have discussed discourse analysis in general terms. This chapter becomes more specific, looking at four published examples of social research to show how discourse analysis is used by researchers. The examples are journal articles which have been chosen to encompass a variety of projects, problems, forms of data, analytic approaches, theoretical traditions and disciplines. All four fall under the broad umbrella of discourse analysis as it is defined in this book. Some of the researchers use that exact term to describe their work, while others refer to discursive practices and constructions, and the analysis of rhetoric, ideological dilemmas and categorization, following some of the theoretical traditions discussed in Chapter 2.

The account of each article begins with an outline of the research project. It sets out the substantive area and problem being addressed and discusses the major claims or findings. It also describes the data collection and analysis and discusses the analytic concepts which are employed and some important premises of the research. Of course any single study will never be a sufficient model for future research but each of the studies discussed in this section does provide a useful illustration of how a researcher used discourse analysis in empirical work. Readers who are interested in finding out more about the research studies may want to refer back to the original article and to other work by the same academics, although the summaries below do provide enough detail for the introductory purpose of this book.

Discourses of health and illness

Example 1

Kirsten Bell (2010), 'Cancer survivorship, mor(t)ality and lifestyle discourses on cancer prevention', Sociology of Health and Illness 32(3): 349–64.

The first article has been chosen as an example of discourse research on health and illness. It is also a discourse analytic project which combines different methods of data collection, interviewing and observation and different forms of data, including transcribed talk and the researchers' fieldnotes. Another point of interest is that the data were originally collected in two different languages.

Discourse research on health and illness presents an interesting challenge to 'commonsense' in that these are being considered as social rather than straightforward biological issues. The author of the article, Kirsten Bell, conducted an ethnographic study with people who were attending support groups after being diagnosed with cancer. The research has obvious applications, for example, in a medical support context, but it is primarily a sociological study.

Bell's interest was in how cancer patients and cancer survivors engage with lifestyle discourses about 'the importance of lifestyle factors (particularly excess body weight, a poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle) in contributing to cancer and their role in managing disease recurrence or progression' (p. 351). These lifestyle discourses can be found in scientific, medical and health sources ('scientific literature', p. 349; 'public health and health promotion discourses', p. 350). In another version, they are part of 'complementary and alternative medical therapies' (CAM) (p. 350). The discourses will be recognizable to most people: they can be regarded as part of commonsense or shared cultural knowledge, not only in Canada where the research was conducted but also in similar affluent Western societies. In addition, Bell notes that people who attend support groups have been found to develop 'collective understandings' (p. 351) so that these discourses may be regarded as part of the more local knowledge or culture of the groups themselves.

To conduct the research, Bell attended three cancer support groups for English-speaking people with different cancers and also interviewed some of the group members individually. A second researcher on the project attended a group conducted in another language, Cantonese, and conducted interviews with some of its members. Because the researchers were participant-observers in the groups, this is described as 'ethnographic' fieldwork. The inclusion of the Cantonese speakers was intended to capture evidence of cultural variation, with issues this might raise. One example which Bell found was that advice on nutrition and diet in some respects conflicted with 'Chinese dietary practices' (p. 356).

The research project combined three kinds of formal data. The first was the researchers' field notes, which were collected over quite an extended period (eight months) of their attending the support groups. The second was the transcripts from the recorded interviews, and the third the written notes from the interviews. The extracts presented in the article are obviously a very small part of the data. For the project as a whole, Bell analyses field notes from eight months of observations by two researchers, and also the recordings, transcripts and additional notes from the individual interviews. Some of this material would have existed in duplicate, in the original Chinese and an English translation. In addition, Bell refers to medical literature and other background material which provided relevant background to her analysis, including many other studies from both medical and social research traditions. Bell used a software package to manage her data. She notes that this was used only in the initial stages of coding, presumably to organize the data into codes or broad categories.

The article includes extracts from transcripts and also from field notes, as in the following example:

Sandra volunteers that in her own case she thinks that it [the cause of her cancer] was genetics but admits that it may also be due to the fact that she was overweight. Daphne expresses surprise at this [Sandra is on palliative chemotherapy and has lost a considerable amount of weight since her diagnosis with metastatic cancer] and Sandra responds, 'Oh, you should have seen me, I was a real porker!' She then looks down at her stomach and sighs that she is still overweight – pinching her gut with her fingers to demonstrate her point. (p. 353)

This account is written by Bell and includes background information, about Sandra's therapy and weight loss, which Bell has presumably collected in an interview or through attending previous meetings. The field notes describe an incident with details which indicate that they are the researcher's interpretation and summary. For example, the expression 'a considerable amount of weight' (emphasis added) indicates a value judgement and the descriptions that Sandra 'volunteers' and Daphne 'expresses surprise' indicate not only what these participants did (they spoke) but also the researcher's interpretation of their feelings. The field notes are fairly full and were almost certainly based on a combination of rough notes taken during the meeting and the researcher's memory of what happened;

ethnographic researchers typically write up their field notes as soon as possible after observing a situation. As the extract indicates, Bell is using as evidence not only the words but also the feelings and actions of her participants. This contrasts with some other discourse approaches which retain a strict focus on the words used (see Example 3, by Elizabeth Stokoe, in this chapter).

The discourses which Bell discusses are ones that she has found in her larger data set and labelled, sometimes following on from previous researchers who had identified similar patterns or features (the analysis presented in Example 2 in this chapter, by Jovan Byford, similarly builds on the findings of previous research). However, other analysts might focus on different divisions and use different labels. For example, it might seem obvious that discourses of CAM are different to scientific medical discourses, but for Bell's research the more important point is that both reinforce lifestyle discourses. The discourses also reflect the analyst's rather than the participants' interpretation; Bell's participants would not necessarily divide or label the discourses in the same way or even be aware of them.

The lifestyle discourses discussed by Bell link disease management, survival and (continuing) remission to certain behaviours and ways of living, such as eating healthily and doing sufficient exercise. The discourses therefore attribute cancer, at least partly, to a patient's failure to take sufficient care of her or himself. By implication, they potentially position patients negatively, as to blame for their own diseases. Bell herself does not make a judgement about the importance of lifestyle factors in preventing cancer or cancer recurrence. Her interest was in how the people who attended the support groups responded to lifestyle discourses.

The analysis explores the participants' 'complex and ambivalent engagement' (p. 349) with the lifestyle discourses. Bell notes that the discourses are not straightforwardly accepted. Instead, the participants sometimes resist and sometimes selectively take up the advice implicated with the discourses. For example, Bell observed that the people who attended the support groups sometimes made jokes about the advice they received from visiting speakers who advised them on nutrition. However, they would also talk in terms of lifestyle factors when they described steps that they themselves were taking to prevent recurrence of their cancer, such as eating carefully or going to the gym. Bell also notes some gender variation in how these discourses were taken up, with women more likely to refer to advice on diet and the importance of nutrition, and men more likely

to discuss exercise. She also notes that there was some resistance through alternative discourses. For example, she cites a participant who suggests that eating what you like is part of a decision to enjoy living in the moment; she is countering a lifestyle discourse with another discourse which might be called 'living life to the full' (although Bell does not use that label).

Lifestyle discourses are individualistic in that they present health as the responsibility of the individual person, in contrast, say, to environmental discourses which might link cancer to problems on a larger social or geographical scale, such as pollution. The lifestyle discourses also link health advice to morality, to notions of being 'good' or 'bad', and to prescriptions about how people should discipline themselves to behave: it is noticeable that the advice tends to present healthy options as ones which people are likely to find less attractive than the unhealthy ones. Bell connects the lifestyle discourses to processes of subjectification, discussing how the discourses position people as certain kinds of subject, that is, as citizens who carry responsibility for their own health and illness. Following the work of Nikolas Rose, discussed in Chapter 2, this research is in the Foucauldian tradition and develops the concept of the self-governing, self-policing 'neoliberal subject'. Bell associates lifestyle discourses with 'Neo-liberal rationality' (which) emphasizes the entrepreneurial individual who is called upon to enter into his or her own self-governance' (p. 350). Following from this 'rationality', there is a potential implication that people who become ill are bad citizens because they have brought the illness on themselves by not managing their lives properly. Bell suggests that the patients who are her participants are to some extent aware of being positioned as responsible for becoming ill. She describes this implication and discusses how they variously accept and resist this positioning. She describes how they talk about 'the sense of guilt, blame and judgement that such discourses produced' (p. 360), and also how they resist these discourses by drawing on alternative explanations which would not make the illness their own responsibility, such as genetic or environmental causes of cancer.

Social researchers who are not discourse analysts often approach participants as informants on their own experiences and feelings and opinions, using talk collected in interviews and focus groups. A discourse analytic study like Bell's similarly treats the talk and the researchers' observations as straightforward reporting. Its distinctive feature is the additional analytic concepts it employs, such as 'discourses' and 'governance'. Unlike many discourse analysts, Bell is not particularly interested in the exact words

used by participants or the details of their interactions. She employs the concepts of 'a discourse' and 'governance' as operating in meanings and behaviours above or beyond the level of talk.

Learning from this example

The article by Kirsten Bell presents an example of the following:

- a discourse analytic study of health and illness;
- an analysis of discourses which refers to the work of Foucault, linked to the work of another theorist, Nikolas Rose, and the discussion of governance or governmentality;
- a project which combines discourse analysis and ethnography;
- a relatively large-scale research study involving more than one researcher;
- discourse analysis of several forms of data in combination;
- a research problem or focus which was not the starting point for the project but emerged in the fieldwork, partly as a result of the researchers' observations and partly because the participants themselves referred to it (this kind of emergent focus is typical of both ethnographic and discourse analytic research);
- an analysis which treats talk as a report of participants' feelings and experiences;
- an analysis which approaches participants as active, in sometimes resisting dominant or hegemonic discourses, and also sometimes inconsistent. This is a complex picture.

The construction of prejudice

Example 2

Jovan Byford (2006), 'Distinguishing "anti-Judaism" from "anti-semitism": Recent championing of Serbian Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović', Religion, State & Society 34(1): 7–31.

This second article has been chosen as an example of interdisciplinary research which brings together history, political science and social psychology. It is also an example of discourse analysis conducted across two languages. The project presented in the article is part of a long tradition of discourse analytic research into prejudice and racism. There is now a

significant body of findings on forms of talk and argument through which social inequalities are rationalized and perpetuated. Researchers have investigated the contemporary language and language practices which attach a negative value to certain groups or categories of people. For example, in a study of 'white' New Zealanders talking about indigenous (Maori) New Zealanders, Wetherell and Potter (1992) noted how talk about 'culture' could be used instead of direct references to 'race'. The central argument of such discourse analytic research is that these new formulations exclude people without violating contemporary social taboos against the open expression of prejudice. In other words, these kinds of talk and writing function as negatively as the more explicit 'biased, prejudiced and racist' talk which is now seen as 'inconsistent with the general values of tolerance' (van Dijk, 1992, p. 115).

Discourse analysts have also explored the kind of political rhetoric which attempts to redefine the nation in order to exclude a negatively valued group. This may be done by constructing a version of history which appears to justify the exclusion, for example, through reference to past conflicts, or by associating an authentic national identity with only a limited part of the current national population. Such rhetoric is part of the ongoing exercise of power in society, inextricably linked to domination, exclusion and sometimes violent oppression. The article analyses an example, looking at details such as how people are categorized and valued, the justifications for the valuing and the construction of arguments and national histories. A central premise of research of this kind is that what is real or 'true' cannot be separated out from the many ways it can be, and is, described. This is not a denial that there is an objective world 'out there' but an assumption that such a world is always viewed and interpreted from a particular perspective and set of interests. There are multiple versions of reality. Observers, including researchers, are insiders with a partial view. Discourse analysts do not try to check the truth of any version or claim but try to understand how it is constructed. By showing that it is a construction and interpretation, they therefore open an apparently authoritative and 'truthful' claim to contestation.

The focus of Byford's research is contemporary accounts of a historical figure which potentially function as exclusionary rhetoric against a racially defined group (Jewish people). The article introduces Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović (1880–1956), who is venerated as a spiritual leader, religious philosopher and theologian. He is respected both within the Serbian

Orthodox Church and in Serbian nationalist political circles. He was canonized by the church (i.e., officially named as a saint) in 2003. What makes this an interesting case, from the perspective of research on prejudice, is that the veneration of the bishop persists in contemporary Serbia in spite of a number of controversies surrounding his personal biography, the most important of which is that he was virulently anti-Semitic. The project looked in detail at the various discursive and rhetorical strategies that Velimirović's supporters (both from within the church and outside it) use to avoid the controversy, deny that the bishop was anti-Semitic or in some instances even excuse his stance towards Jews.

Byford's project is a case study, focusing on a specific situation and context but making claims which have a wider importance and application. First, he discusses the national context, Serbia, as an example of an Eastern European nation-state which is in transition from communism and a possible site of the rise of the politics of the far right, in a revival of the fascist movements of the period before World War II. The case is therefore located within the larger scale of historical and political change. Second, he discusses the rhetoric around this case as examples of patterns of argument, justification and denial which have been employed more widely, both in racist and prejudiced talk in more local contexts (the concern of many social psychologists who analyse discourse, as noted above) and in academic and political arguments around anti-Semitism, the particular form of racism which is invoked in the case.

The data for the study were all collected in a relatively short period of four months, centred on a point of celebration of the key figure, Bishop Velimirović. The main data are audio recordings of interviews or 'conversations' between the researcher and 12 Serbian public figures, conducted in July and August 2003, shortly after the bishop was canonized. An unusual feature of the research is that these participants are not anonymized; they are identified 'by name, rank and occupation' on the grounds that they are all public figures. However, they are not discussed as individuals but for their status as influential 'memory-makers' and contributors to political debate.

Another form of data is published and broadcast material in the public domain. Byford analyses a range of texts ('newspaper interviews, commentaries, editorials, serialized texts, debates and readers' letters as well as a small amount of radio material') which had been produced in the preceding months (May and June 2003). The project therefore combines collected and 'found' data consisting of both spoken and written language.

The analysis draws on the researcher's knowledge of the context, including its recent history. The original data are in Serbian and most of the analysis was conducted in that language (the researcher is bilingual). The article is in English and data extracts are presented in translation but sometimes also with the original Serbian, for example, when details of wording or grammar in that language are relevant.

Part of Byford's analytic approach is to examine his data for features of talk and argument ('rhetoric') which have been noted by previous analysts. For example, he shows how some speakers set up a contrast between an extreme position and a supposedly more moderate and, by implication, excusable claim. One common strategy involves creating the distinction between 'real' anti-Semitism (of the kind propagated by the Nazis), and 'biblical' anti-Semitism (a 'critique' of Jews found in parts of the Christian Bible, including the allegation that Jews killed Christ) with the latter being presented as acceptable. By scrutinizing the rhetoric of Velimirović's supporters, and situating it in the appropriate historical and ideological context, the research suggests that the distinction between the two supposedly different forms of anti-Semitism is in fact false.

Why is this important? Because, Byford argues, 'this exercise in the redrawing of the boundaries of antisemitism can play an important role in the denial of prejudice' (p. 17). The insistence that there is an 'acceptable' form of anti-Semitism helps to perpetuate anti-Jewish prejudice by presenting it as an acceptable and inevitable aspect of the Christian faith. Like the references to 'culture' studied by Wetherell and Potter (1992), the arguments employed by Velimirović's supporters are a contemporary form of prejudiced talk. Such talk can make negative categorizations of a group appear excusable, unproblematic and, potentially, normal, acceptable and justified, with all that can follow from that. Byford notes that there are 'increasing antisemitic incidents in Serbia' and suggests that the contemporary celebration of Velimirović is 'the most powerful ideological source of anti-Jewish prejudice in Serbian culture from which contemporary antisemitism derives much of its legitimacy and authority' (p. 27).

This is therefore a wide-ranging study which refers to social, political and intellectual activities taking place over an extended historical period. It traces connections between political and religious ideas, political purposes and activities and the talk and writing of specific individuals, such as politicians and journalists. It illustrates the possibilities of a complex 'multi-layered' analysis of broadcast talk and political publications within

national and institutional contexts, including the context of the Orthodox Christian church. It also moves between different levels of data, linking 'micro' details of talk and written language (the use of particular words like 'just'); larger discourses of religion and nation; contemporary and historic identities, including both group and individual identities, and 'macro' accounts of history and politics. The analysis builds on a theorization of the working of power in society by which competing claims to authority, entitlement and even social presence are assumed to be played out in talk and argument, sometimes as the justification for other actions. Byford investigates anti-Semitism as a 'lived ideology' (a concept he takes from Billig et al., 1988), that is, as the power relations which are in an ongoing state of renegotiation, contest and reinforcement within the everyday activities and communications of the people who make up society. Byford's interest is in the anti-Semitism which is 'regularly disseminated in speeches, books, articles, sermons and everyday talk' about this figure, Bishop Velimirović.

Learning from this example

The article by Jovan Byford presents an example of the following:

- a discourse analytic study of prejudice and racism;
- a cross-disciplinary study (politics, history, social psychology);
- an analysis of the discourse of politicians and public figures;
- a case study centred on an event celebrating a particular figure;
- a study which combines analyses on different levels, investigating the intersections of argument and rhetoric with political ideologies, nation-making and the rewriting of history;
- an analysis of racist political rhetoric which links the celebration of a single controversial politicized figure with larger political movements and historical trends;
- a research project which combines collected and 'found' discourse data.

Gender in talk

Example 3

Elizabeth H. Stokoe (2003), 'Mothers, single women and sluts: Gender, morality and membership categorization in neighbour disputes', *Feminism & Psychology* 13(3): 317–44.

The third article presents analyses of talk about disputes between neighbours. It is an example of discourse research which looks at a social problem and also contributes to a major area of social science research, on gender. It is a piece of feminist discursive research in which gender identities are considered as 'performances, constructions and enactments, rather than rigid and unchanging essences' (p. 318). This is consistent with the theories of social practice and identity discussed in Chapter 2, including the work of Judith Butler. In addition, Stokoe's article is an example of research from discursive psychology which presents fine-grained discourse analysis in the conversation analytic tradition, examining the details of interaction and, in particular, categorization.

The starting point for the project which Stokoe discusses is the relationships between neighbours. This topic links the research to the particular social and cultural context of the United Kingdom, since one element is the conventions around how neighbours behave. However (as with Bell's study), similarities can be assumed in many other countries, giving the research a wider relevance and potential application. In addition, as already noted, the research concerns gender. In the opening sections of the article, Stokoe makes connections between these various foci. She argues that 'as neighbours describe, report and account for their own and others' activities, they display the social order, which, in turn, regulates everyday neighbouring practices' (p. 319). In their talk, speakers refer to 'people's actions as either appropriate to or as breaches of the moral or social order' (p. 319), and in doing this, Stokoe notes, they refer to values, to 'good' or 'bad' neighbours, women and men' (p. 320). This value-laden talk can partly be taken as evidence of the existing social order, a snapshot of society and its beliefs.

These premises follow from the ethnomethodological tradition. As discussed in Chapter 2, the major premises of ethnomethodology are that society is never static but always in the process of being made and re-made, and sometimes subtly altered, through the ongoing practices of everyday life. The 'macro-level' of society is inseparable from these 'micro-level' practices. Stokoe is considering talk as one such micro-level practice, looking at its effects and consequences. She explores connections between 'neighbour relationships, gender and morality' (p. 317) through an analysis of how women are categorized in the talk, the positive and negative values which are invoked in these categorizations (e.g., around being a good or bad mother) and how the talk functions as part of the ongoing 'constitutions of the gendered social and moral order' (p. 340).

More specifically, the analysis draws on the work of Harvey Sacks, the originator of the approach known as Conversation Analysis (CA). Stokoe uses a variant of CA called Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA). This investigates how talk functions partly through the kinds of grouped or associated meanings which were discussed in Chapter 2. MCA does not refer to discourses but to 'categories [which] may be hearably linked together by native speakers of a culture' (Stokoe, 2003, p. 321). Stokoe cites a famous example from Sacks' work: when we hear "The baby cried. The mommy picked it up', we will of course assume that the 'mommy' is the 'mommy' of the 'baby'. This is because our cultural knowledge of the larger category of 'family' (a Membership Categorization Device) links the categories 'mommy' and 'baby' with certain actions ('category-bound activities') and characteristics ('natural predicates'). MCA explores how a brief reference to one part of the MCD may invoke other parts, ideas of what is normal and so on.

Like CA, this can be seen as a 'technical' approach (Schegloff, 1997) in that it begins with a close examination of what the participants say and builds up an interpretation and argument from the details of their talk, in this case, about good and bad neighbour behaviour by women and men. However, it also draws on the analyst's own insider knowledge as a member of society since she explores the 'inferences' derived from the social context in which the language is being used, that is, the wider social meanings of categories, as well as the meanings which come out of the immediate conversation.

It is important not to assume that Stokoe is interpreting her speakers as planning their talk in advance, like master strategists. In the approach she uses, talk is understood as part of living, that is, as a form of action which, like body movements (walking, gesturing, changing facial expressions) carries meanings for (most) people around us, is more or less ongoing, and is *done* mostly without thinking or preparation. As someone interested in the working of the physical body might slow a film to study the details of the movements of limbs and muscles, so analysts like Stokoe use audio recordings of talk, transcribed in great detail, in order to examine how conversation is 'done'. This is therefore very different from an unravelling of the intended implications of a pre-planned statement, like a political speech or a public relations release. A study like Byford's which uses the latter forms of data might assume that speakers are presenting well-rehearsed arguments which perhaps were planned and carefully worded in advance;

however, as discourse analysis this will still assume that the talk is an action which occurs in context and is shaped by that context. It will be a unique situated version, even if to some extent it repeats arguments and wording which have been prepared and used before.

Stokoe's study uses two forms of data. One consists of televised recordings in which people talk to chat show hosts about problem neighbours. The other is recordings from centres in which mediators attempt to resolve disputes between neighbours by talking to the people involved. As in most conversation analytic studies, Stokoe's recordings are transcribed in close detail to show the irregularities of ordinary talk: repetition and re-starts; sounds which are not words ('mmm', 'hhh'); pauses; overlaps between the talk of different speakers; and some features of *how* the words are spoken (e.g., more or less quickly and more or less loudly).

This is one of the data extracts presented in the article. It is part of the talk from a mediation session in which people are talking about a neighbour with whom they have a dispute:

- 1 E: [I mean I came home the other day and she was (.) arguing with
- 2 somebody at the top of her voice in the street (.) [and it was eff'ing
- 3 ? [(?)
- 4 E: this and [eff'ing that
- 5 L: [yeah (.) she's eff'ing all the time=
- 6 E: and I can't beli↑e:ve that somebody would have such a showdown
- 7 in the
- 8 street=
- 8 G: =have you heard her shouting at the kids why don't you piss off? to
- 9 these tiny little kids (.) at the gate? (.) I've heard her saying it
- 10 (.) you know (.) this I don't know [...]
- 11 C: is she has anybody actually approached her
- 12 L: she [()
- 13 E: [how can she [()
- 14 G: [how can you ↑talk to the woman?
- 15 L: you just get a mouthful

Following the principles of MCA, Stokoe's analysis of this talk considers the categories of people involved and the activities which are linked to these categories. In this extract, she notes that 'the category 'woman' is linked to activities including 'arguing', 'eff'ing', 'shouting at the kids' and saying 'why don't you piss off' (p. 340). To understand the significance of

this link between category and activity, think about the different meanings which would be invoked if the same activities were linked to another, male category of person, such as 'man' or 'youth'. As Stokoe notes, there are 'moral' issues being invoked in this account: 'Here, "bad" women swear in the street and in front of children, they are foul-mouthed, they argue in public places and are bullies.' The account of their neighbour which these speakers build up is not only 'about' a particular incident but also about wider social values and expectations regarding women, their roles and behaviours. Stokoe comments: 'In constructing such categorizations, the participants display their category knowledge (e.g., "women" should not "swear") and position themselves as powerful knowers of the "right" way for women to act (Nilan, 1995).' In short: 'Neighbour disputes about noise, vandalism and communal spaces are enmeshed with moral assessments about appropriate behaviours for women' (p. 340).

Stokoe is interested in the gendered nature of the neighbours' complaints for several reasons. First, as she comments, they probably reflect the continuing cultural association of women with home, local neighbourhoods and 'community and domestic space'. Second, they show how 'women' and their inappropriate activities become the focus of neighbour disputes' (p. 332). She suggests that this is a form of 'cultural regulation' because the disputes function to reinforce established meanings around gender and gender identities: 'in order to maintain "viable" femininity, women must engage only in those activities conventionally associated with their category.' The disputes about the proper behaviour of neighbours are therefore also about the proper behaviour of women more generally, and the policing of one, in the broad sense of watching and attempting to control, is part of the social policing of the other. In the terms used in this book, gendered discourses are reinforced. A third claim which Stokoe is making is that this analysis of how gender is invoked in one kind of dispute, between neighbours, is likely to be relevant to other situations since gender is almost always present as a potential point for comment: it is 'a pervasive resource'.

In her more recent work, Stokoe (2010) has extended the concept of MCDs in an analysis of the talk of men who are being interviewed by the police. There is a strong pattern of the suspects categorizing themselves in a certain way, as the kind of men who do not hit women. This is not just a matter of self-description; the categorization functions as a denial that they have committed an offence. Stokoe is arguing against the kind of

interview-based research which treats a discourse as a generalized resource drawn on to talk *about* something. By showing a much more specifically situated use of categorization to *do* something, and do something 'consequential' for the speaker, Stokoe emphasizes the functional nature of talk in interactional contexts.

Learning from this example

This article by Elizabeth Stokoe presents an example of the following:

- a discourse analytic study of gender;
- a discourse analytic study of a social problem with findings which have practical applications (Stokoe's website provides further details of her involvement in related work);
- Membership Categorization Analysis, a form of conversation analysis;
- an analysis which emphasizes the functional nature of talk;
- a project which uses naturally occurring data;
- a project which combines found data and newly collected data;
- an analysis with a focus which emerged from the data (an important principle in conversation analytic research); the research was not set up as a project about gender;
- an analysis of closely transcribed talk which avoids any interpretation in terms of the speakers' intentions, motives, emotions or other 'inner states'.

Leadership in an organization

Example 4

Ruth Wodak, Winston Kwon and Ian Clarke (2011), "Getting people on board": Discursive leadership for consensus building in team meetings', *Discourse & Society* 22(5): 592–644.

The fourth article discusses discourse analytic research in the area of workplace and organization studies. In the words of the authors and researchers, the research adopts 'an interdisciplinary discourse-oriented approach to leadership in meetings and teams, studying discourse in use' (p. 593). It investigates how leadership is 'accomplished' or 'performed' in the chairing of workplace meetings, particularly the skills and 'strategies' employed (p. 594). The article suggests that this approach contrasts with

previous writing and theorizing in which leadership is discussed either as a style of setting goals and giving rewards (transactional leadership), or in terms of the leader providing a role model (transformational leadership). The research project is therefore presented as a novel investigation of an established topic. The research is described as 'critical', first because of this challenge to established understandings of leadership, and second because of its concern with the links between leadership and power.

The article sets out its rationale for adopting a discursive approach to the study of leadership. The premises are that the effectiveness of a team depends on shared agreement, or consensus, among its members, and the formation of such consensus depends on good leadership. Within an organization, the people officially designated as leaders are potentially powerful, but not all of them will fulfil this potential. The successful performance or enactment of leadership requires 'discursive skills' and strategies and these can be investigated through an analysis of the talk which occurs in meetings, although the full context of this talk needs to be understood.

The research was conducted in an Australian company, referred to pseudonymously as Defence Systems International (DSI). Two field researchers observed meetings and other group interactions (workshops, an away day) over a six-month period, making field notes. They also conducted individual interviews with some of the staff who attended the meetings. The data set consists of the transcripts from 150 hours of recordings of the meetings and interviews, although at some stages of the analysis a further selection is made. The interpretation and discussion of the transcripts is informed by the background knowledge which the researchers obtained from the fieldwork. This is referred to in their accounts of the participants, the issues under discussion, the influence of people not present and subsequent events. The ethnographic element of the research is therefore used to locate the meeting transcripts within the larger context of the company.

The project combines this ethnographic element with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA refers to a family of approaches rather than a single method (Wodak, 2007). It is interdisciplinary, drawing on sociology and sociolinguistics, and explores language as an element of social processes by considering a range of features or aspects. Critical Discourse Analysts study interactions and sequences of talk, like conversation analysis researchers such as Elizabeth Stokoe, and they are also interested in the argumentative

and rhetorical aspects of talk and texts, like those which are the focus of Jovan Byford's study. Critical Discourse Analysts also investigate the kinds of patterns which Kirsten Bell and others call discourses (see Fairclough, 2001b, pp. 229–66). More distinctively, CDA involves a micro-analysis of details of grammatical and communicative ('pragmatic') aspects of talk including, in this study, pronouns and tenses, and speech acts, such as questioning and telling.

The discourse analytic approach adopted in the study is described in detail. The data set of the transcripts from the interviews and meetings was analysed (in part or in full) in four stages, referring to different levels. The first stage was a computer-assisted corpus linguistic analysis, using software which detects recurrent uses of 'keywords' (see Yates, 2001, pp. 93–146, for a detailed example). This is close to the ideal of an objective or technical analysis, in that it is statistical; however, there will inevitably also be judgement and interpretation involved, in this case, in the researchers' initial selection of a subset of meetings which they thought were most relevant to the company's strategy. They then conducted the keyword analysis on the transcripts from these selected meetings.

In contrast, in the second stage of the analysis, the researchers conducted an interpretive analysis of agenda items and related topics of discussion, looking for patterns of the discussion (including 'topic elaboration' and 'argumentation patterns') in order to identify the 'macro-topics', 'primary' and 'secondary' topics. The third stage of the analysis was to classify the various strategies of the leaders of the meetings, and the fourth to consider how these strategies were used to 'achieve consensus'. The multi-level analysis can therefore be described as moving, broadly, from what was discussed (topics) to how it was talked about, then to how the leaders intervened in the discussions and produced agreement.

The researchers identified five 'discursive leadership strategies' which were linked back to the two styles of leadership identified by previous writers (transactional and transformational). Following the multiple foci of CDA, these strategies are discussed in terms of various features, including the grammar and also the communicative functions (linguistic-pragmatic) of the talk. Although some of these features might seem sufficiently specific to be identified unquestionably, the analysis is not as objective or technical as, say, counting key words. The analysis is interpretive. The researchers conduct it as informed observers, able to understand the

talk in context because of the knowledge they have built up through the ethnographic study, including their reading of 'confidential company documents'.

The five strategies identified by the researchers are as follows:

- (1) *Bonding*. This is defined as 'the discursive construction of group identity that supports motivation to reach consensus and a decision' (p. 603). The authors suggest it is evidenced in a leader's use of the personal pronouns. Part of the analysis was to count the relative uses of individual ('I') and group ('we') references by the talk of someone chairing a meeting.
- (2) *Encouraging*. This is a strategy to open up general discussion and encourage other speakers to participate in order to promote a sense of the decisions being made by the group as a whole. The features of the talk which are taken as evidence of this include linguistic-pragmatic features such as questions to invite others to express their opinions, and 'the questioning/supporting of existing propositions, via repetition, positive back-channeling and explicit praise' (p. 604).
- (3) *Directing*. In contrast to the previous strategy, this involves closing down or resolving the discussion and is evidenced, unsurprisingly, by opposite features: making firm statements rather than asking open questions; summarising ('So ...'), and privileging of the chair's views over those of others, including by 'blocking' what they say. Although it might seem possible to detect features like this by looking for specified details (statements, not questions; particular words), identifying the strategy also requires interpretation. For instance, the researchers cite examples of someone pointing to an architectural drawing and saying, 'Look at this building', which closes down the previous discussion, or making a joke, which has the same effect.
- (4) *Modulating*. This strategy involves contextualizing an issue in terms of urgency by linking it to larger imperatives or threats, for example, by suggesting (or denying) that there is only a limited time in which to achieve something. Again, it is difficult to reduce this strategy to features or categories which can be identified without interpretation. The analyst will have to look at the functions of a particular utterance in context.

- (5) *Re/Committing*. This is the strategy of moving from a shared understanding to an agreement to act. It often involves a reference to the future, so grammatically, a change of tense. It may also involve reference to people's duties or responsibilities, or an appeal to their values.

The researchers then discuss extracts from transcripts of meetings to show how the chair of the meetings uses the different strategies and how their use constitutes a leadership style. On the basis of the analysis, the researchers argue that 'an egalitarian leadership style positively influences the formation of consensus within a team and, importantly, increases the likelihood of a durable consensus being achieved' (p. 612).

It is important to note that the same leader can adopt different styles in different contexts, and the same strategies can to some extent be employed as part of different styles. For example, directing can close down discussion, as part of a more authoritarian style (corresponding to transactional leadership) but it can also be part of summarizing and therefore a step towards reaching consensus in a more egalitarian (transformational) style. As with other forms of discourse analysis, a constant or predictable connection is not assumed between a 'type' of person and a form of discourse or discursive practice.

More unusually, at some points in the analysis, the researchers speculate about the mental states of the speakers, suggesting, for example, that a chair has previously made a decision which he does not disclose during the meeting. This contrasts with approaches, such as conversation analysis, which avoid attributing intention to speakers (see the discussion on discourse analysis and psychology in Chapter 2). In this study, there is some implication that leadership strategies and styles are employed intentionally, at least to some degree. This would suggest that the research findings have practical implications: people can be taught to be more effective leaders. However, this is not stated directly.

Learning from this example

The article by Ruth Wodak, Winston Kwon and Ian Clarke presents an example of the following:

- a discourse analytic study of leadership in organizations;
- a project which combines Critical Discourse Analysis and ethnography;

- an analysis of meeting talk;
- a study which combines analyses on different levels, linking a macro issue, the exercise of power through leadership, to language practices, including the use of argument and rhetoric, and the details of the language itself, including linguistic features;
- a relatively large-scale study involving more than one researcher;
- an analysis which is not confined to speakers' talk but also speculates about their intentions and other mental states.

Concluding comments

The four articles which have been discussed in this chapter present some of the possibilities and varieties of discourse analytic research. All four articles are interdisciplinary, investigating issues and situations which are of interest to academics in several areas of the social sciences. However, the analytic approaches employed by Jovan Byford and Elizabeth Stokoe are more closely associated with discursive psychology (Stokoe's article was published in a psychology journal), including in the sources they cite.

As already noted, the researchers and authors describe their studies in different ways and employ different concepts. Kirsten Bell uses the term 'discourse' to refer to a family of words and images associated with a particular topic. Her discussion of 'lifestyle discourses' and 'health promotion discourses' includes reference to a 'nutritional discourse' which distinguishes between 'good' and 'bad' food. The discourse therefore links specific words (such as 'diet' or 'healthy eating') to values (here, 'good' and 'bad' categorizations for particular foods and eating habits) which in turn are connected to larger ideas (what you eat affects your health; you have a responsibility to monitor your eating; eating well can prevent the onset or recurrence of cancer) and consequently to activities and aspects of society which are not so easily contained in language (cancer support groups; nutrition as a field of professional training and qualification; the distinction between medical and other forms of treatment; the pressure which cancer patients may feel to monitor their behaviour and even take responsibility for having brought the disease on themselves).

Jovan Byford mostly uses the term 'discourse' to refer to the talk or language of a particular speaker or source. He refers to 'public discourse', for talk and publications which are directed to a wide public audience, and

'ecclesiastical discourse', for talk which is by and about religious matters, in contrast, say, to official political communications. He also refers to 'the discourse of the Right', meaning both the language of certain speakers, from a particular political position, and the words, images and meanings which make up or constitute their politics. Elizabeth Stokoe is interested in the discourses that 'shape our gendered world' and in how 'taken-for-granted "facts" about women's appropriate behaviour and characters are perpetuated in discourse', that is, in people's talk. For Wodak et al., the analysis of discourse involves multiple levels, from 'strategy' to the details of wording.

Published accounts of research findings from particular projects, like these four articles, do not usually include detailed descriptions of how the analyst worked with her or his data. Nonetheless, there are some points which can be noted.

The first is that all four projects were conducted by the academics who wrote up the research, sometimes with the involvement of others. Discourse analysis is often the work of a single academic who works through a data set, becoming familiar with it, exploring and making connections and building an interpretation and argument which is relevant to the starting concerns of the project. This may place a practical limit on the scale of a discourse analytic project, especially the quantity of data which can be worked with. However, joint analysis is possible, although usually only in a small team. (An example of how this might be done is presented in Chapter 4.) Bell's project involved a second researcher, although there is no indication that the analysis was a joint process. Kwon and Clarke conducted the data collection for their relatively large project, and then worked together with Wodak on the analysis.

A second point to note is that all the analyses were conducted across the data sets. In other words, they were not confined to discrete items like a single speech or document or even a single interviewee. Discourse analysis is concerned with language use as a social phenomenon and therefore necessarily goes beyond *one* speaker or *one* newspaper article to find features which have a more generalized relevance. This is a potentially confusing point because the publication of research findings is generally presented through examples and the analyst may choose a single example or case to *exemplify* the features to be discussed, but those features are only of interest as a social, not individual, phenomenon. Occasionally the particular case may be chosen precisely because it has a wider social

importance, as with Byford's discussion of Bishop Velimirović as a focal figure in contemporary Serbian politics.

In all four studies, the researchers also worked with far more data than can ever be written up or published. Wodak et al. did include extended transcripts in appendices to their article, but these were still only a small part of their full data set. This links to a further point to note: as part of the familiarization process, the researchers in all four studies had collected background material. Such material is sometimes separate to the data which are analysed and sometimes has a different function in the study. For example, Bell's attendance at the support group sessions, recorded in her field notes, presumably provided some of details which assisted her analysis (background on her participants and their experiences; practical information about different treatments and their side effects, etc.). Her description of her research as 'ethnographic' marks this backgrounding as part of the research process. Some of her observations are included in her field notes. Byford had clearly researched Serbian history and collected other information as part of his extensive data set, all of which was necessary background to his analysis (e.g., the biography of Bishop Velimirović and the history of the treatment of Jewish people in Serbia and former Yugoslavia). Stokoe's analysis of Membership Categorization Devices draws on her own cultural knowledge, for example, about the meanings and associations attached to motherhood. She had also clearly learned about neighbourhood mediation services and the kinds of problems they commonly deal with, and had probably watched far more broadcast material than she eventually included in her data set. The analysis by Wodak et al. refers to details of the company's situation and the relationships between staff which the researchers had learned during their fieldwork. As these examples indicate, a discourse analytic project often involves the kind of background or support familiarization which will enable the researcher to conduct an analysis as an insider (or partial insider), and this may sometimes blur with the data collection.

The fourth and final point to note here is that the four analyses refer back to, and build on, the findings of previous research, and the concepts used. Like other research, discourse analysis is always located within a tradition of ongoing research, substantively, that is, in terms of the topic or problem being investigated, and methodologically, in terms of the particular approach and concepts which are employed. Two of the studies refer to named approaches, Membership Categorization Analysis and Critical

Discourse Analysis, but both developed these approaches to accommodate the requirements of the specific studies. The process of conducting a discourse analytic study is discussed in general terms in the next chapter.

Summary

Chapter 3 has discussed four published studies as examples of discourse analytic research.