

Vaughan, E. 2012. *Discourse Analysis*. In: J. Arthur, M. Waring, R. Coe & L.V. Hedges (eds.), *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education*. London: SAGE, pp. 272-282.

## Discourse Analysis

Elaine Vaughan

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

### Introduction

Discourse is all around us: as McCarthy, *et al.* (2002: 55) so succinctly put it: ‘Life is a constant flow of discourse – of language functioning in one of the many contexts that together make up a culture.’ In an obvious, though nevertheless taken-for-granted, way, language is intrinsic to the creation and maintenance of the institutions and practices that we may wish to investigate as educational researchers; hence the importance of discourse analysis, and its critical contribution to our analytical toolkit. But discourse analysis is a teeming field, as Taylor (2001, p10) suggests that any budding researcher who has attempted a literature search on the topic will attest, made up of a variety of disciplinary fields, all of which take a specific view of what *discourse* and *discourse analysis* means. In this chapter, an overview of the provenance of what has come to be termed discourse analysis will be outlined. As it is not possible to deal with all of these in detail, a selection of fields, their theoretical backgrounds and methodological concerns will be discussed. Research methods are rarely, if ever, independent of some epistemological stance (Gee, 2005, p6), and so this direction is taken in order to illustrate how the findings a researcher might arrive at by using a particular discourse analytic approach are inextricably linked to the theory that underlies their method.

If we start with what is meant by the term *discourse analysis*, we will find that it is defined by Stubbs (1983, 1) as referring to the study of ‘...the organisation of language above the sentence’; Brown and Yule (1983, p1) see the analysis of discourse as ‘...necessarily, the analysis of language in use’, while for Fairclough (1992, p28), discourse itself is ‘...more than just language use: it is language use, whether speech or writing, seen as a type of social practice.’ Schiffrin (1994, p. viii) provides a useful way of conceptualising what discourse analysis is about in her identification of some of the questions that discourse analysts, whatever their disciplinary origin or theoretical bent, attempt to answer: ‘how do we organise language into units that are larger than the sentence? How do we use language to convey

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information about the world, ourselves, and our social relationships?’ Jaworski and Coupland (1999, p3) state that the reason that discourse ‘falls squarely within the interests not only of linguists, literary critics, critical theorists and communication scientists, but also of geographers, philosophers, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, social psychologists and many others’ (we might add here, ‘and educational researchers’) is because ‘despite important differences of emphasis, discourse is an inescapably important concept for understanding society and human responses to it, as well as for understanding language itself.’ Therefore, for both linguists and those interested in how language works, and for those whose research agenda foregrounds how language is implicated in social processes, discourse analytic methods are relevant.

### **Approaches to Discourse Analysis**

As previously mentioned, the ways in which discourse is conceptualised and studied have emerged from the theoretical viewpoint of many different disciplines, and though the approaches that have spread tentacle-like from these disciplines may differ, they are united in that now, on the whole, they prioritise naturally occurring language, as opposed to abstract formulations. The fact that there are such a range theoretical stances on discourse, situated in sometimes quite distinct perspectives which influence how discourse is defined, viewed and analysed, raises a very practical issue for the researcher: as previously mentioned, it can be difficult ascertain where in the discourse analytic literature to start. As Gee (2005, p.5) points out, no one approach to discourse analysis is ‘...uniquely “right.” Different approaches fit different issues and questions better or worse than others. And, too, different approaches sometimes reach similar conclusions though using different tools and terminologies connected to different “micro-communities” of researchers.’ There is a lot to be said, in fact, for taking an eclectic approach to discourse-based analysis (see also recommended readings). Eiggins and Slade (1997: 24) present a useful schematic which positions their own eclectic approach to the analysis of casual conversation in relation to the theoretical origins of each discourse analytic approach they consider relevant to it, and this contributes to creating a coherent picture of discourse-focussed research studies and the theoretical foundations they are built on (see also McCarthy, *et al.*, 2002, p. 60). Briefly then, and in very broad strokes, they describe the field of discourse analysis has been populated by work in:

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- ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), a movement within the discipline of sociology, via *conversation analysis* (dealt with in more detail below);
- sociology and anthropology, via *interactional sociolinguistics* (concerned generally with how language is affected by the social context in which it takes place) and *variation theory* (which in its early stages, for example, was characterised by work which focussed on the relationship between social and geographical factors and phonological patterns, e.g. Labov, 1972);
- the philosophy of language, via *Speech Act Theory* (which centres around the fact that we can ‘do’ things with words, like apologise, criticise or compliment) and *pragmatics* (a branch of analysis interested in the relationship between what is said and what is meant);
- linguistics, via structural-functional approaches to the analysis of language, such as the Birmingham School (see below for a more detailed view) and a research agenda which has come to be known as Critical Discourse Analysis, now quite distinct from, but originating in, critical linguistics.

For a more detailed and comprehensive overview of each of these discourse analytic areas, see Schiffrin (1994), Eggins and Slade (1997), Jaworski and Coupland (1999), Weatherall, *et al.* (2001a; 2001b) or Schiffrin, *et al.* (2003); for an excellent guide which situates discourse analysis for language teachers, see McCarthy (1991). The areas that will be discussed in greater detail here, along with a focus on how discourse is approached theoretically and methodologically and in terms of data collection and analysis, are Birmingham School discourse analysis and conversation analysis. This selection of approaches may seem quite random; however, one of the critical touchstones for any researcher seeking to explore discourse analysis in relation to educational research is Sinclair and Coulthard’s (1975) pioneering work on discourse structures in the classroom (this approach is frequently glossed as the Birmingham School of discourse analysis, the driving force having been a group of researchers at the University of Birmingham). Conversation analysis has contributed enormously to what has been described as ‘institutional talk’ – arguably, what any educational researcher will be dealing with as data may well be broadly categorised thus.

*Birmingham School*

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In 1975, Sinclair and Coulthard published a seminal paper describing a structural approach to the description of classroom discourse (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). The aim of this work was to investigate the structure of verbal interaction in the classroom, and, crucially, anchor it to the discipline of linguistics (Coulthard, 1985, p120). The data they analysed was from traditional teacher-fronted lessons in England, the teacher asking ‘display’ questions (i.e. questions to which they know the answer) and the pupils answering these questions when nominated by the teacher. Below is an extract typical of the data they analysed (Extract 1):

*Extract 1*

T = Teacher    P = any pupil who answers

T:        Now then. I’ve got some things here too. Hands up. What’s that? What is it?

P:        Saw.

T:        It’s a saw. Yes this is a saw. What do we do with a saw?

P:        Cut wood.

T:        Yes, you’re shouting though. What do we do with a saw? Marvette?

P:        Cut wood.

T:        We cut wood.

(Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975, pp. 93-94)

The boundary of the lesson is realised in ‘Now then’, these boundaries are categorised as *transactions*. Sinclair and Coulthard called the question-answer-feedback sequences (underlined in the extract) *exchanges*. These exchanges are made up of different *moves*, a questioning move, an answering move and a feedback move. Finally, within these moves, we can see individual actions, such as the nomination of a student to answer a question, or an instruction to the students to raise their hands, even an admonishment to the pupil who shouts his or her answer, these they classified as *acts*. The status and relationship of moves and acts in discourse is very similar to that of words and morphemes in grammar (Coulthard, 1985, p125) ‘whereby words combine to make groups, groups combine to make clauses and clauses

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combine to make sentences' (Hoey, 1993, p115). In this respect, Sinclair and Coulthard draw heavily on the early descriptive work of Halliday (1961; the Hallidayan approach to discourse has been very influential, and is strongly connected an approach to discourse analysis termed *Systemic-Functional Linguistics*). This is very clearly evidenced in the model they developed to describe how smaller units combine with other units of the same size to form larger units; *lesson* is at the 'top' of their rank-scale model for classroom discourse. In descending order of size, their analytical units are *transaction*, *exchange*, *move* and *act*: *acts* combine to form *moves* which in turn combine to form *exchanges*, and so on.

Sinclair and Coulthard see the exchange as the heart of classroom discourse (Hoey, 1993, p116). A three-move structure was proposed for exchanges – Initiation, Response and Feedback (*IRF*). They posited that all exchanges will feature *Initiation* and *Response* but not necessarily *Feedback*, later *Follow-up*. As Hoey observes (*ibid.*, p118) 'feedback is uncommon in some interactive genres, while in others, like classroom discourse and quiz show, it is virtually compulsory.' They distinguish between free and bound exchanges and teaching and boundary exchanges, which mark the boundaries of the major sections of the lesson. Stubbs (1983, p146) suggests that Sinclair and Coulthard's model is most suited to what he calls 'relatively formal situations in which a central aim is to formulate and transmit pieces of information' and so is ideal when analysing the structure of classroom discourse, doctor-patient interaction or service encounters (such as the interaction which occurs when we buy something in a shop, or go to a hairdressers etc.). Casual conversation, however, does not necessarily lend itself to this type of analysis, given that its general aim could be said to be 'a phatic or social one rather than the transmission of information' (Clancy, 2004, p138). Stubbs (1983) and Hoey (1991 and 1993) have adapted Sinclair and Coulthard's model in order to analyse conversation in more informal settings. What they suggested is that exchange structure in everyday, naturally occurring spoken discourse is more complicated than the simple three-part exchange of Initiation → Response → Feedback. Hoey (1991, p74) states that:

Just as most naturally occurring sentences are complex, that is, constructed out of one or more clause, so also most naturally occurring exchanges are complex – the result of combining two or more simple exchanges. The simple exchange is characterised by having a single initiation and response, while complex exchanges have one or more of each.

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Hoey claims that speakers combine exchanges and in doing so make discourse more complex and flexible. An example from a study of family discourse (Clancy, 2004, p139), Extract 2, illustrates this complexity. In this extract, two family members, Susan and Tom, are discussing whether or not you can use a steam cleaner to clean a car:

*Extract 2*

**S=Susan, T=Tom**

**T:** Handy now if you had a what d'you  
ma call it? You know if you got a  
second hand car or anything like that.

Initiation

**S:** You're not supposed to be able to use it on a car  
on the outside of a car.

Response

**T:** I mean on the inside of it.

**Feedback treated as Initiation**

**S:** Oh yeah. It'd | it would clean the  
inside of a car no bother. But it's supposed to  
be too hot for the outside of a car.

Response

Here, *Feedback* is treated as *Initiation* and therefore the listener treats the *Feedback* as if a new exchange has been started. The discrepancy between the ad hoc nature of this tiny sliver of casual conversation and the excerpt from Sinclair and Coulthard's data is conspicuous. As Walsh (2006, p47) points out there is, furthermore, a major discrepancy between the context of the 1960s primary school classroom and the contemporary, in Walsh's context, language classroom, which displays far more 'equity and partnership in the teaching-learning process' (*ibid.*). Despite the fact that it has been shown to be perhaps too rigid for modern classroom discourse, Sinclair and Coulthard's model still has resonance for discourse analysts. Their

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theorising of the components of the exchange has been highly influential, and no discussion of discourse analysis, particularly as it relates to educational discourse, would be complete without it.

### *Conversation Analysis*

Conversation Analysis (CA) has its theoretical roots in ethnomethodology, which is itself a hybrid research approach. The originator of the approach, sociologist Harold Garfinkel, modelled this hybrid label after existing terms in research concerned with cross-cultural analyses of 'doing' and 'knowing'. Essentially, it presupposes people have a reserve of common-sense knowledge regarding their activities, and how those activities are organised within enterprises. It is this fundamental reserve which makes the knowledge orderable. Ethnomethodological research is thus concerned with revealing what it is that we know. Another suggestion within this area is that 'knowledge is neither autonomous nor decontextualised; rather, knowledge and action are deeply linked and mutually constitutive' (Schiffrin 1994, p233). Furthermore, participants continuously engage in interpretive activity negotiating and creating knowledge during the course of their social action, this action and interaction in turn generates the knowledge by which further activity can be created and sustained. Therefore, 'social action not only displays knowledge, it is also critical to the creation of knowledge' (*ibid.*).

These precepts were then applied specifically to conversation, most significantly by Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. To connect the principal ideological tenets of ethnomethodology and CA, let us assume that our knowledge manifests itself publicly in our utterances. These utterances are designed to occur in particular sequential and social contexts. Here, CA and ethnomethodology converge: conversation is how our sense of the world in general, and social order in particular, is both constructed and negotiated – we create our world with words. CA at this point diverges in its theoretical construction of underlying 'patterns' of conversation and its methods of analysis. It employs its own esoteric transcriptions, and notation of relevant features '...its broader provenance extends to ... the disposition of the body in gesture, posture, facial expression, and ongoing activities in the setting...' (Schegloff, 2002, p3).

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Its catholic concerns mean there is much to interest the discourse analyst. Where it is most obviously at variance with other methods of discourse analysis is in the fact that it is wary of linguistic categorisation, namely in the categorisation of the linguistic function of specific items or phrases, believing categorisations may be over-generalised, indeed may not at all reflect the actual uses of the items or phrases. Conversation analysts also avoid making generalisations about what interactants (or participants) ‘know’, and deny that social ‘identity’ is necessarily a factor, insofar as ‘social identity’ is a problematic construct, and more cautiously again as Schegloff (1987, p219) asserts, ‘...the fact the they [social interactants] are ‘in fact’ respectively a doctor and a patient does not make these characterisations *ipso facto* relevant.’

Heritage (1984, p241) lists three assumptions of CA:

- (a) Interaction is structurally organised;
- (b) Contributions to interaction are contextually oriented, and
- (c) These two properties inhere in the details of interaction so that no order of detail can be dismissed *a priori* as disorderly, accidental or irrelevant.

What is said not only constitutes data for analysis but also the basis of the development of hypotheses and conclusions for CA as a discipline. CA believes that interaction (conversational or otherwise) is ‘structurally organised’. It articulates this *structure* through the isolation and analysis of certain features of conversation, for example, adjacency pairs. Schegloff and Sacks’ (1973, pp. 295-96) work on adjacency pairs define them as two-part sequences, ordered as first part and second part. The presence of a first part requires the corollary presence of a second part, or one of an appropriate range of second parts. In other words, the first part of a pair *predicts* the occurrence of the second: ‘Given a question, regularly enough an answer will follow’ (Sacks 1967, cited in Coulthard 1985, p69). Adjacency pairs are integral to the turn-taking system in conversation (discussed below) and the absence of a second part is noticeable in conversation, if only for practical reasons (an unanswered question may stall the development of the conversation). Further work in analysing adjacency pairs (Pomerantz, 1984; Atkinson and Drew 1979; Levinson 1983) has developed the notion of preferred and dispreferred second-parts. For example an invitation



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first part 'prefers' an acceptance second part, as opposed to a refusal (even when this refusal is not a 'flat' refusal, but tempered with an 'account' of the refusal). Hoey (1993) has also mentioned 'adjacency pairs' such as 'hi/hi' and 'how are you/fine' and defines them as 'frozen exchanges', there is no need to actively process this type of interaction, though they are necessary procedural preambles to the development of the exchange (see above section for more on exchange structure analysis).

The most fundamental aspects of the *organisation* of conversation are, according to Schegloff (2002, pp. 4-5):

- (a) Turn-taking (the organisation of participation)
- (b) Turn organisation (forming talk so that it is recognisable as a unit of participation)
- (c) Action formation (forming talk so that it accomplishes one or more recognisable actions)
- (d) Sequence organisation (deploying resources for making contributions cohere, for example, topically)
- (e) Organisation of repair (dealing practically with problems in interaction, for example, problems in hearing and/or understanding)
- (f) Word/usage selection (selection, usage and understanding of words used to compose the interaction)
- (g) Recipient design (all of the above as they relate to our co-participants in talk-in-interaction).

To extrapolate from these, the turn-taking system is of immediate concern to any analysis of talk in general, and of course institutional talk in particular. CA attempts to explain how participants in talk decide who talks, how the flow of conversation is maintained and how gaps and overlaps are avoided. It has posited '...a basic set of rules governing turn construction, providing for the allocation of a next turn to one party, and co-ordinating transfer so as to minimise gap and overlap' (Sacks, *et al.*, 1974, p12). A full discussion of these rules is not possible here. Probably the most salient aspect of the discussion of these turn taking rules ('taking' in its literal sense) is the ability of participants to identify and seize

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upon ‘transition-relevance places’, i.e. points in the interaction where it is possible and/or appropriate to take or resume a turn, so that the interaction runs smoothly.

Another of the above aspects that is particularly interesting is the idea of recipient design – the design of utterances or turns with a view to our co-participants. Tannen and Wallat for example, have studied how a paediatrician selects and switches between different linguistic registers according to whether she is addressing the mother or the child during the consultation (Tannen and Wallat 1987, cited in Drew and Heritage 1992, p9). In institutional talk, recipient design may not only be an asymmetrical phenomenon (where we, consciously or unconsciously, consider what the effect of our contributions on our superiors will be), but also of consideration in maintaining and enhancing our institutional and social profiles with regard to our colleagues. In terms of institutional talk, Heritage (2004, p225) suggests a number of dimensions of analysis that can reveal the “fingerprint” (cf. Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991, pp. 95-96) of the institutional situation under analysis. These are:

- its turn-taking system;
- the overall structure of the interaction;
- sequence organisation;
- turn design;
- lexical choice, and
- epistemological and other forms of asymmetry.

As an example of how CA-type analysis can be applied to real data, consider this extract from a staff meeting in the English language department of a public university. The meeting is drawing to a close, and the Chair of the meeting is Peter, the Head of Department. Rita, Olivia, Harry and Julia are teachers in the department who are present at the meeting:

*Extract 3*

[Note: <\$O> marks the beginning of an overlapped utterance; <\\$O> marks the end of an overlapped utterance]

- (1) **Peter:** I'm teaching this after I'll write that down chapter four done. Eh I think maybe should we I think we should meet maybe a little bit regularly. <\$O30> When could we meet again? <\\$O30>. **Is a weekly meeting maybe a little bit too maybe once a fortnight at least?**
- (2) **Rita:** <\$O30> I think that would be a good idea <\\$O30>.
- (3) **Olivia:** Yeah. Once a fortnight.
- (4) **Peter:** Once a fortnight **okay**.
- (5) **Harry:** Yeah we should try to start preparing for that PET exam like we need.
- (6) **Julia:** We need to get all the resources.
- (7) **Peter:** And resources for that as well. **Okay**.
- (8) **Rita:** **Okay. Thank you.**

(Vaughan, 2009)

We can note a number of features of this closing phase. From the point that we pick up the interaction, there are eight turns which accomplish the closing of the meeting. Button (1987, p104) identifies making arrangements as one of the sequence types regularly used to move out of closings along with back-references, topic initial elicitors (e.g. *yeah, okay*), in-conversation objects (e.g. minimal response tokens), solicitudes (*drive carefully, take care*), re-iterating the reason for a phone call and appreciations (*thank you*). At the end of the meeting, Peter (the HoD) moves to close by making an arrangement for the next meeting (*when could we meet again? Is a weekly meeting maybe a little bit too maybe once a fortnight at least?*). When two of the participants answer his question – Rita (3) and Olivia (4) – Peter summarises the response and this is bounded by *okay* suggesting a final turn. Harry, however, initiates a new topic (6) and this is supported by Julia (7); Peter moves to shut this topic down fairly decisively by summarising it and again bounding the move with *okay*. The meeting closes when Rita echoes the boundary marker and thanks Peter. The hierarchical, institutional nature of the talk is evident in the way that Peter, as Head of Department, takes control of the

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closing phase of the meeting (for more on meetings as interactional events, and phases within them, see Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997). The relationship between language and power, both at micro- and macro-level is very much a concern of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995, 2001; for an extensive overview of Critical Discourse Analysis in educational research, see Rogers, *et al.*, 2005).

### **Discourse Analysis and Teacher Language: Data and Analysis**

Turning our attention briefly to research on the topic of how teachers use language is helpful in terms of conceptualising what type of research is being done, how discourse analytic data is collected and analysed, and the ethical concerns that are implicated in accessing and using this type of data. Frequently, discourse analysis is categorised as an exclusively qualitative method, however, this is not always the case (as will be seen below). In addition, this sphere of research highlights how central understanding teacher language is in connection to how classrooms work, and how the profession considers its practices within them reflexively. Walsh (2006) suggests that teachers' classroom language is characterised in the following ways:

- teachers control patterns of communication in the classroom;
- the classroom is dominated by question and answer routines;
- 'repair' or correction of learner errors is a prerogative of the teacher;
- teachers typically modify their speech to accommodate learners.

Walsh's own research proposes a framework (*Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk*, or *SETT*) to aid teachers in their description of language used in this classroom context and as a conduit for understanding the complex interactional processes that occur within it (*ibid*, 62-92). SETT is a very useful framework for educators with an interest in researching teacher language in the classroom context, though most particularly so for those engaged in language teaching and learning.

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More findings from the field of language teacher education (LTE) are also illuminating in terms of the professional concerns of language teachers. In the initial stages of LTE, the development of trainees' language awareness is obviously a priority. Trappes-Lomax and Ferguson (2002) highlight practical concerns in language education for trainees, such as meta-linguistic awareness, target language proficiency and pedagogical skills with regard to teaching language. Whilst these concerns take centre stage, concepts such as language as a social institution, as verbal and reflexive practice and its position as the medium of classroom communication are considered neglected, though essential, aspects of teachers' language awareness. An example of the extent to which trainee teachers are required to be reflexive in their awareness of language and its use in the classroom is evident in Extract 4, which is taken from Farr's (2005a) analyses of trainer-trainee interaction in LTE in the Irish context (see also Farr, 2003; 2005b):

*Extract 4*

**Tr=Trainer    Tee=Trainee**

Tr:        ...now one area that I want you to try a difficult area to work on+

Tee:       My voice is it? I noticed.

Tr:        The sounds you know the pronunciation of the T H sounds+

Tee:       Mmhm.

Tr:        +ah don't don't do you ever use them correctly? You're from Cork are you?

Tee:       Killarney.

Tr:        Killarney.

(Farr, 2005a, p198)

The discourse of teacher training has huge potential as a route for investigation in educational research. Farr's work is focussed on a specific event, feedback meetings on trainee's observed classes, an event within the initial training of teachers which is inherently face-threatening (Reppen and Vásquez, 2007, p16). This is manifestly evident in the extract from

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Farr's data above: here the trainer is required to criticise the trainee's regional accent, and contrast it with the 'correct' pronunciation she/he should be modelling for her/his students. Also in the teacher training context, Vásquez and Reppen (2007) report on collecting recordings of post-observation meetings. Both researchers were teaching on an MA in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) as part of which students gain practical English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching experience. The post-observation meetings conducted by them, as supervisors, were intended to engender a reflective rather than evaluative model feedback, and so as supervisors/mentors they wished to create an open, discursive space to facilitate this (*ibid.*, p159). However, an analysis of the participation patterns in the meetings indicated that, in fact, the supervisors/mentors did more of the talking than the trainees. This empirical insight led to an actual change in practices for the supervisors/mentors involved. They increased the number of questions they asked the trainees, and thus they were able to turn the floor over to the trainees by creating the more effective discursive conditions for reflection.

All discourse analysts use texts – whether spoken or written. Many of the spoken texts have been, in the past, transcriptions of interviews, for example, but also transcriptions of naturally occurring events and interactions. The act of transcribing these spoken interactions represents the final stage in data collection for analysts. The initial stages being the negotiation of access to the situation that will yield the spoken data desired and obtaining consent to record from potential participants. All academic institutions will have their own ethical guidelines and procedures, but the fundamentals of ethical access to and use of data require that participants are guaranteed anonymity – in transcribing the event participants should naturally be given pseudonyms; however, any other references within the transcript that could potentially identify the speakers should also be removed, such as institutional names, geographical references and so on. Transcription itself is, as Roberts (2010) points out, a great deal more and a great deal less than talk written down. The way in which an event is transcribed can bias how it is read and interpreted, and any transcription represents an event that has been reduced in two ways: firstly, the recording removes it from its original context (live, online production of talk) and it is further reduced by being orthographically transcribed. In addition, transcriptions that attempt to be faithful to the original event by including pauses, hesitations, false starts, ellipsis and contractions, to name but a few, run the risk of appearing 'messy' or 'incoherent'; however, as Cameron (2000, p33) points out, we frequently think

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transcribed talk is ‘incoherent’ and not communicatively efficient because the written form is our model of coherence and this is a bias we need to ‘unlearn’:

Analysts of talk must work from the assumption that if communication is not breaking down in a given instance than participants must be able to make sense of it, no matter how incoherent it must seem; and if certain features recur in spoken language data, they must serve some purpose, however obscure we find it.

For example, in an investigation of the workplace meetings of English language teachers, the present author found laughter to be a frequent feature within the transcripts (Vaughan, 2007; 2008). This prompted a focus on the interactional implications of humour and laughter in the meetings, in terms of when they occur and who produces them. This study, and also the studies carried out by Vásquez and Reppen, and Farr, mentioned above, share a common characteristic. They synthesise quantitative methodologies derived from the area of corpus linguistics (referred to variously as a methodology and a discipline in the literature – see Tognini-Bonelli, 2001, for a full discussion of this issue) with discourse analytic methods. As mentioned, discourse analysis has frequently been referred to as a qualitative method; however, many discourse analysts have always integrated some form of quantitative analysis to complement the qualitative insights that the data they collect yield. Corpus-based studies store the transcriptions of spoken text, or selections of written text, as text files and use specialised software, such as WordSmith Tools (Scott, 2008). Previously, corpora, defined by as Tognini-Bonelli (2001, p55), ‘computerised collection of authentic texts, amenable to automatic or semi-automatic processing or analysis...selected according to specific criteria in order to capture the regularities of a language, a language variety or sub-language’, were by definition large, expensive to compile (particularly spoken components) and the preserve of researchers working at the level of word or clause. However, in recent times more researchers have been fruitfully using corpora large and small to investigate discourse-level phenomena (Ädel and Reppen, 2008). For an overview of how to build spoken and written corpora, and using corpus analysis tools to retrieve information about linguistic patterns from computerised collections of texts, see O’Keeffe and McCarthy (2010). For an overview of issues in how teachers can use corpora for their own research see Vaughan (2010).

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Discourse analysis is not, therefore, a discrete research ‘tool’ as such, but a label that glosses a teeming and heterogeneous field of research. What the various approaches to language now have in common is a focus on naturally occurring language-in-use. The two approaches summarised here – Birmingham School discourse analysis and conversation analysis – derive from a broadly linguistic and broadly sociological theoretical bases respectively, and the approaches produce different ways of understanding how language is organised above the sentence. While discourse analysts of the Birmingham School are interested in how language is structured according to the genre in which it occurs (owing much to the Systemic Functional Linguistics that underpins it), conversation analysts have concerned themselves much more with how speakers naturally and instinctively navigate interaction, the careful observation and consideration of which reveals an order to the ostensible chaos of conversation. Both approaches are descriptive in this way. Research in the language of educational contexts has also been exemplified, in terms of initial teacher training, the post-observational meeting; from the point of view of teachers looking at their own language (Walsh’s SETT approach as reflective tool for analysing the talk that teachers produce in the classroom); and some data from outside the classroom, teacher talk in meetings, has also been presented.

Language is never neutral, and as researchers using language we strive to acknowledge and mitigate our biases in analysing it – it is, however, fundamental to social life and the institutions that permeate it.

### **Questions for Further Investigation**

1. In the context that you are researching, what types of talk or written text are embedded in it (e.g. policy documents, textbooks, meetings, informal situations of talk within an institution)?
2. How might you ‘capture’ some of this spoken or written discourse? What might a sufficient sample of it be?
3. If you are recording spoken discourse, how will you present your aims to participants in order to gain consent to record? How much input will your participants have into the research? Will they have access to the



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transcriptions? Will you follow up with them in terms of interviews or questionnaires?

4. As you read your transcriptions/collections of written discourse, what are the first things that strike you about them? Can you identify any particular lexical items (particular words or phrases) or linguistic strategies (such as indirectness, or questions) that appear to be frequent?
5. How will you code and investigate those items? When you do a literature search on the item/strategy, what tradition or approach to discourse analysis does research on this particular item seem to 'fit' into, if any?

### **Suggested further reading:**

- 1 a) Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. and Yates, S.J. (Eds.) (2001) *Discourse as Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE/Open University Press  
b) Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. and Yates, S.J. (Eds.) (2001) *Discourse as Data*. London: SAGE/Open University Press

These companion volumes cover a large amount of ground theoretically and methodologically on discourse analysis as an approach to social scientific research more generally. The *Discourse as Theory and Practice* volume takes the reader through the foundations of discourse analytic research, and includes classic articles. The *Discourse as Data* volume focuses on analytic approaches in discourse analysis more generally, and covers fundamental issues in treating spoken or written discourse as data.

- 2 Gee, J.P. (2005) *Discourse Analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). London: Routledge.

Gee distinguishes between Discourse ('big D Discourse') and discourse ('little d') in this introductory text – a useful distinction for newcomers to discourse analysis and its quite broad field of literature. Gee's work more generally will be of particular interest to educational researchers.

- 3 Cole, K. and Zuengler, J. (2008) (Eds.) *The Research Process in Classroom Discourse Analysis: Current Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

This edited volume is made up of multiple discourse analyses of the same classroom derived data (a high school biology lesson). The discussions of the theory-practice nexus that are interspersed in the chapters should be of critical interest to educational researchers with a focus on discourse analytic research.

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