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Discourse Analysis

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Discourse Analysis (DA) refers to the systematic study of *discourse* (both written text and talk) and its role in constructing social reality. DA is much more than a qualitative methodology: it is theoretically and epistemologically informed by social constructionism and has been central to challenging the dominance of cognitive and perceptual theoretical models in psychology. Although it is sometimes presented as a unified tradition in psychology, as this chapter will make clear, there are currently a diverse range of approaches to analysing discourse that differ markedly from each other. This chapter will consider this tradition of research, its intellectual influences, historical trajectory in psychology and the radical critique it has directed towards many of its taken-for-granted concepts. It will also outline some core principles in DA and demonstrate how they are examined in the analysis of discourse.

DA's Critical Roots

The emergence of critical perspectives in psychology can in part be attributed to the increasing interest in the role and function of language as a socially constitutive force in consciousness and experience. The turn to language in the social and human sciences in the 1990s has been associated with generating new and fundamentally different ways of *doing* psychology that can

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be contrasted to the quantitative and experimental methods that have dominated the discipline. DA is one of these critical approaches. As a tradition of research, DA is fundamentally critical: first, it is critical of traditional psychology, its theories, models and practices, arguing that as a discipline, psychology has produced asocial, decontextualized and dehumanizing models of the person and second, by explicitly engaging with social and political issues, it is particularly critical of psychology's role in the maintenance, reproduction and legitimation of oppressive relations and practices (Hepburn, 2003). As a tradition of research, DA represents one of these critical approaches, but as we will see, there are a number of approaches to analysing discourse that differ philosophically from each other.

The Emergence of DA in Psychology

In 1987, *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* (DASP) was published by Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell. This ground-breaking book is widely recognized as introducing DA to an increasing number of disaffected social psychologists and which generated something of a 'quiet revolution' in the years to come (Augoustinos & Tileaga, 2012). The epistemology advocated by this book was fundamentally different from the positivist and realist epistemology of traditional social psychology. Potter and Wetherell (1987) advocated for a social constructionist and non-cognitivist epistemology (and ontology) that fundamentally reformulated topics central to social psychology: psychological constructs such as self and identity, attributions, attitudes, social categorization and prejudice were reconceptualized as discursive practices that were enacted in everyday social interaction rather than cognitive processes that took place in the internal machinations of the mind.

DASP drew on several intellectual influences, not the least of which was the social constructionist movement and its critique of traditional psychology. It also drew on philosophical linguistics and in particular Wittgenstein's later philosophical writings (*Philosophical Investigations*, 1953), which emphasized the interactive and contextual nature of language. In contrast to conventional theories that theorized language to be an abstract and coherent system of names and rules, Wittgenstein viewed language as a social practice. While the former treats language as a 'mirror of reality', reflecting a world 'out there', Wittgenstein argued that words and language do not have independent objective meanings outside the context and settings in which they are actually used. Moreover, Wittgenstein challenged the view that language was

merely a medium through which people expressed and communicated inner mental phenomena such as feelings and beliefs. Wittgenstein rejected the conventional and dominant understanding in both psychology and philosophy, that there are two separate and parallel systems—cognition and language—one private and the other public. Rather, Wittgenstein argued that, ‘language itself is the vehicle of thought’ (1953, p. 329).

This emphasis on language as a social practice is central to DA, which seeks to analyse empirically how language is used in everyday activities and settings by participants. The action orientation of discourse is associated with another important influence: John Austin’s speech act theory (1962). Speech act theory emphasizes how people use language ‘to do things’, to achieve certain ends. Words are not simply abstract tools used to state or describe things: they are also used to make things happen. People use language to persuade, blame, excuse and present themselves in the best possible light. Thus, language is functional, it ‘gets things done’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Another intellectual influence in DA (and one that has been central to the development of ‘Discursive Psychology’ (DP) associated with the Loughborough School) is Conversation Analysis (CA). CA is an ethnomethodological tradition that examines ordinary conversation in its everyday natural settings. In contrast to cognitive science and sociolinguistics that treat language as an abstract system of rules and categories, CA begins with people’s actual talk in social interaction—‘*talk-in-interaction*’, as it is commonly known. Central figures in the development of CA, such as Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, have demonstrated through the close analysis of conversational materials that everyday conversation is orderly and demonstrates reliable regularities in its sequential turn-by-turn organization (Sacks, 1995; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). CA attends to the ways in which participants’ talk is oriented to the practical concerns of social interaction; how, for example, descriptions, accounts and categories in conversation are put together to perform very specific actions such as justifying, explaining, blaming, excusing and so on. For example, a pervasive feature of everyday talk and conversation is that participants attend to their own stake and accountability (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Social psychology has typically treated talk-in-interaction as primarily inconsequential to social life. Moreover, as a source of data, everyday talk is viewed as ‘messy’, containing hesitations, pauses, interruptions, self-corrections and so on. CA, however, emphasizes how such features of talk may be highly relevant in interaction, which has led to very specific requirements regarding the level of transcription recommended for recorded materials in

CA work. It is typical in CA to include details in transcripts such as the length of pauses, overlapping talk, intonation, hesitations, emphasis and volume.

Another important influence in DASP and one that remains central in critical discourse analysis (CDA, see below) is post-structuralism and in particular, the work of Michel Foucault. Despite the enormous impact and influence that Foucault's work has had in the humanities and social sciences generally, psychology as a discipline has remained largely impervious to his prolific writings on the nature of knowledge and subjectivity. This is no surprise given the subject matter of Foucault's writings, which challenged traditional notions of truth and knowledge (Foucault, 1972).

Foucault was interested in the historical emergence and development of various disciplines of knowledge, particularly the social sciences and how this body of 'scientific' knowledge exercises power by regulating the behaviour and subjectivities of individuals throughout all layers of society. Foucault argued that modern power is achieved largely through the self-regulation and self-discipline of individuals to behave in ways which are largely consistent with dominant discourses about what it is to be human. These discourses shape and mould our subjectivities, the people we ultimately become. For example, dominant psychological discourses about the self for a large part of the 20th century have extolled the virtues of logical, rational thought, cognitive order and consistency, emotional stability and control, moral integrity, independence and self-reliance. These humanist discourses are powerful in that they have contributed to the shaping of certain behavioural practices, modes of thought and institutional structures which function to produce people possessing these valued qualities. Moreover, institutions and practices have emerged which rehabilitate, treat and counsel those who fail to become rational, self-sufficient, capable and emotionally stable individuals. Thus, psychology, as a body of knowledge and a 'scientifically' legitimated discipline, shapes and prescribes what it is to be a healthy and well-adjusted individual (Rose, 1989).

Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity, by Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine (1984, 1998), was among the first books within psychology to directly engage with Foucault's writings on modern forms of subjectivity and psychology's role in producing subjects and identities shaped by the dominant discourses of individualism and cognitivism. As we will see below, discursive psychologists who draw from this tradition of work, and in particular from Foucault, understand and use the term 'discourse' rather differently from those who use this term to refer to everyday talk and conversation. Foucault's influence in DA, however, cannot be overestimated, especially in the development of CDA.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Unlike the approach to DA originally advocated by Potter and Wetherell (1987) that is primarily located at the micro-level of everyday social interaction, CDA emphasizes how discursive practices or ways of talking about the world are predominantly shaped by influences outside of the immediate interactional context of speakers. Specifically, these influences are the historical, political and cultural contexts within which speakers live their lives. Critical discursive psychologists have argued that certain ways of talking or constructing objects and events become pervasive and dominant in particular historical moments, which make them more culturally available and thus more powerful in constructing social reality. Critical DP looks outside specific discursive interactions and reflects upon the social and historical context within which both everyday conversation and formal institutional discourse take place. What does this socio-political context say about power relations between groups and how do various institutions within the wider society propagate and reproduce particular constructions that come to dominate our subjective experience and our very individual and social identities (Edley, 2001; Henriques et al., 1998; Wetherell, 1998, 2001)?

As already noted, CDA draws heavily on post-structuralist theory and particularly, Foucault's writings on discourse, but again, there is no unified approach to this tradition. While major exponents such as Wetherell (1998, 2001) adopt this critical framework, her work is largely empirical and still shares important similarities with more conversation-analytic inspired discursive work. In contrast, Ian Parker (1990, 2012) eschews empiricism, is less interested in everyday talk and conversation and more concerned with identifying and describing hegemonic 'discourses' which proliferate within society and which inform, shape and construct the way we see ourselves and the world.

Discourse as a Coherent Meaning System

Parker, and others inspired by post-structuralist writings, uses the term *discourse* to refer to a recurrently used 'system of statements which constructs an object' (1990, p. 191). So, for example, within western societies, there exist a number of dominant discourses which inform and shape various aspects of our lives. We have a biomedical discourse which informs our understanding of anything to do with health and illness; we have a legal discourse which provides us with certain codes of conduct and rules for behaviour; we have a

familial discourse which buttresses views about the sanctity and importance of the family. While Parker defines discourses as 'coherent systems of meaning', contradictions and inconsistencies within discourses are common, as are alternative discourses, which compete with dominant ones for recognition and power. Often discourses are related to or presuppose other discourses or systems of meaning. Discourses primarily function to bring 'objects into being', to create the status of reality with which objects are endowed. As already discussed above, they also position us in various 'subject positions', so that discourses invite us, even compel us, to take on certain roles and identities. For example, a nationalist discourse positions us in the role of a flag-waving citizen. Often, however, this is achieved by addressing us by virtue of our ethnic and/or racial identity which may effectively exclude some groups (e.g., immigrants). Parker does not restrict discourse to just spoken and written language. Discourses can be found in all kinds of texts, such as in advertising, popular and high-brow culture, non-verbal behaviour and instruction manuals.

As coherent meaning systems, Parker argues that discourses have a material and almost 'physical presence'. Like Moscovici's (1982) concept of social representations, discourses, once created, proliferate within society. Importantly, however, Parker does not view discourses in idealist terms but sees them as grounded in and shaped by historical and political (material) 'realities'. Thus he does not subscribe to the linguistic and political relativism which is associated with some discursive approaches. Parker and other discursive researchers (e.g., Willig, 1999, 2001) position themselves as 'critical realists', who are committed to developing an approach to discourse which is sensitive to the material and socio-structural conditions from which discourses emerge and take shape. The political edge to this discursive approach is that it emphasizes how some discourses function to legitimate existing institutions and to reproduce power relations and inequities within society (Parker, 1990).

Parker's notion of 'discourses' has been criticized for its reified and abstract status. For him, discourses, as entities, exist independently from the people who use them. In contrast, approaches that are located at the other end of the continuum of discursive work are attuned to the context-specific and functional ways in which talk or discourse is mobilized in specific situations. These approaches define discourse as a 'situated practice' and thus provide a more social psychological focus to discursive research (Edwards, 2012; Potter, 2012). However, this social psychological focus on how participants use language in specific interactional contexts does not preclude a critical and political analysis of how pervasive and recurring patterns of talk justify and legitimate inequitable relations and practices (Augoustinos, 2013) as we will see below.

Current Trends: Discourse Analysis Now

Since the publication of DASP by Potter and Wetherell (1987), DA has flourished in psychology and has generated a significant body of scholarship (Billig, 2012). It is important however to emphasize that DA is also practised in other disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, historical and cultural studies which have developed their own analytic methods and approaches to analysis and interpretation. As with all intellectual traditions, several approaches to DA have developed within psychology itself, differing from each other in important ways. This diversity of approaches to DA can be represented as lying on a continuum between two distinct and influential approaches at either end. The first of these can be broadly identified by the work of Jonathan Potter and Derek Edwards who have developed an approach that is significantly influenced by CA and its focus on the local, interactional and sequential nature of everyday talk and conversation in its natural settings (Edwards, 1997, 2012; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996, 2012). This is specifically referred to as DP and is associated with the Loughborough School. At the other end of the spectrum, there is CDA, which is perhaps best exemplified by Ian Parker's (2002) work. This latter approach specifically calls itself *critical* to emphasize its explicit political agenda and its critical realist and materialist epistemology. While this work is informed by social constructionism, emphasizing the difficulty in ascertaining a 'true' version of reality, it nonetheless maintains that it is possible to arrive at a veridical version that cuts through the mystifying layers of ideology. This is in contrast to Potter and Edwards' work which maintains a relativist epistemology that questions the notion of a fixed and knowable reality (Edwards, Ashmore, & Potter, 1995). Moreover, like CA, DP is fundamentally concerned with how participants themselves treat the interaction, what participants treat as relevant, how they display understanding, disagreement and so on in their talk. Analysts should not impose their own categories of understanding on the conversational materials nor should they infer underlying motivations or cognitions for participants' talk. The talk itself and its action orientation is the focus of analysis (Schegloff, 1997). This particular directive for analysts to refrain from imposing their own interpretations of participants' talk has led to heated debate within the discourse community about how to conduct 'proper' analysis (Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Smith, Hollway, & Mishler, 2005).

Discursive work in general can be located anywhere along this continuum. For example, prominent figures in the field such as Margaret Wetherell (1998; Edley & Wetherell, 1995) and Michael Billig (1991, 1999), whose work

borrowed from the insights of DP but also attends to the ways in which discourse (and rhetoric) is shaped by the sense-making practices and discursive resources that are pervasive in a particular society or culture, can be located somewhere in between these two contrasting approaches.

More recently, Parker (2012) has argued that these different approaches to DA can be organized hierarchically into eight different types at four levels of analysis ranging from the micro- (CA) to macro-levels (CDA). This range of approaches to DA reflects the increasing proliferation of qualitative research in psychology and the significant success it has had in challenging the dominance of positivism. This is in contrast to the intellectual climate of the late 1980s and early 1990s when the 'turn to discourse' and critical psychology more generally was just beginning to take off.

Despite its increasing acceptance in British social psychology, DA continues to attract considerable antipathy from the mainstream. Specifically, DA is often derided as lacking scientific objectivity and precision. The irony, of course, is that such criticisms fail to critically reflect upon the questionable assumptions that are built into the very fabric of quantitative research methods and their claims to scientific objectivity.

Potter (2012) and Edwards (2012) have recently addressed common misconceptions and criticisms of their discursive approach (DP) that have been used to legitimate its continued marginalization and exclusion from mainstream social psychology. Potter specifically addresses two major recurring critiques: that discursive research is primarily descriptive rather than explanatory and about construction rather than causation, and as such fails to meet the criteria for legitimate scientific inquiry (Manstead, 2008). Contrary to this mistaken depiction of DP, Potter details both the methodological and theoretical coherence of DP as an empirically driven programme of the systematic analysis of naturalistic records of human interaction and social action as they unfold in real time. Indeed, such an approach that emphasizes careful observation and description before generating hypotheses or building models is central to the scientific method. As Potter makes clear, it is surprising that a discipline like social psychology (and psychology for that matter) prefers to study human behaviour in contrived and artificial ways than in their natural settings of everyday life, where psychological matters are live concerns for participants. DP aims to identify and understand widely shared normative practices that regulate and sequentially organize social interaction.

Similarly, Edwards (2012) argues that the methodological imperative in DP to treat 'talk as talk' and as managed and organized for social action by participants is far less interpretative and subjective than experimental and quantitative psychology. Edwards questions the privileging in psychology of

cause–effect relationships and makes a strong case for a rigorous conceptual analysis of the ‘systematic, research tractable-set of practices by which people render themselves intelligible to each other’ (p. 433): that the intelligibility of social life is to be found in the normative bases of human practices and accountability. This is essentially what makes DP ‘psychology’ and thoroughly scientific.

Core Principles in Discourse Analysis

Despite the different approaches to DA, all share some defining features that make them clearly distinct from quantitative and positivist approaches to psychology. Four of these core principles include (1) discourse is constitutive, (2) discourse is functional, (3) discourse is built and organized by shared repertoires of meaning, argumentative tropes and rhetorical tools and (4) discourse constructs identities.

Discourse Is Constitutive

DA is primarily interested in how people use language to understand and make sense of everyday life. Discourse is viewed as reflexive and contextual, constructing the very nature of objects and events as they are talked about. This emphasizes the constructive nature and role of discourse as it is used in everyday life. This is fundamentally different from the approach taken in traditional psychology which has at its core a perceptual-cognitive metatheory (Edwards, 1997) that treats objects in the world or ‘reality’ as an unproblematic given. ‘Reality’, in this view, is directly perceived and worked upon by cognitive computational processes, which is then, finally, reflected in discourse. Perceptual cognitivism treats discourse as merely reflecting a stable and presupposed world ‘out there’. In contrast, DA inverts this traditional approach and treats discourse as analytically prior to perception and reality (Potter, 2000).

DA begins with discourse itself, with descriptions and accounts of events and issues that are produced in talk. Discourse is therefore constitutive—objects, events, identities and social relations are constructed by the specific words and categories we use to talk about them. This is in stark contrast to psychological approaches that treat language as neutral, a transparent medium that merely reflects the world (Wetherell, 2001). The dominant metaphor of language as a picture that reflects or mirrors reality views language as passive

and as 'doing nothing' (Edwards, 1997; Wetherell, 2001). In DA, language is viewed as actively constructing and building versions of the world.

Many social psychologists find DA's emphasis on language rather than cognition difficult to accept: our everyday experience of consciousness and thought furnishes us with the self-evident 'reality' of internal cognitive representation, and the very idea that our experiences and practices are not cognitively mediated may seem absurd. Cognitivism is indeed a 'discourse' that is dominant, not only within science but also in the everyday world where people live out their lives. Cognitive concepts such as attitudes and beliefs are part and parcel of our everyday language and most people talk of their 'attitudes', 'beliefs' and 'opinions'. DP, for example, treats these constructs as 'talk's topics': topics that participants themselves attend to in their talk in order to perform the important business of everyday social interaction (Edwards, 1997). The categories of the mind are therefore treated as topics of conversation rather than actual mental states that have an independent existence.

Discourse Is Functional

Another central principle in DA is that discourse is functional; talk is a social practice that accomplishes social actions in the world. What people say (and write) depends on the particular context in which it is spoken and the functions it serves. In the ebb and flow of everyday life, the context within which discourse occurs and its function continually shift and change. As people are engaged in conversation with others, they construct and negotiate meanings or the very 'reality' that they are talking about. In contrast to most traditional approaches in psychology which look for stability and consistency in people's cognitions, DA stresses the inherent variability of what people say, as content is seen to reflect contextual changes and the functions that the talk serves. So, for example, people's accounts or views about a particular issue are likely to vary depending on how the talk is organized and what it is designed to do: for example, is it organized in such a way as to justify a position, attribute blame, present oneself positively? DA, then, is interested in analysing why a particular version of social reality is constructed in a particular way and what it accomplishes in that particular context. Thus 'the focus is on the discourse *itself*: how it is organized and what it is doing' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 4; original emphasis). This emphasis on the inherent variability of discourse challenges traditional approaches to the attitude construct in social psychology

where research is specifically designed to quantify people's attitudes. Related to this is the observation that discourse is often organized rhetorically to be persuasive. People orient to the availability of multiple and different versions of the world in their discourse by building specific constructions in ways that undermine alternative accounts. Billig's (1991) work on the argumentative and rhetorical context of discourse has been influential and has highlighted the dilemmatic nature of people's sense-making practices.

Discursive Resources and Practices

Traditional cognitive constructs such as attitudes, beliefs, opinions and categories have been replaced within DA by an emphasis on identifying the resources and practices that are drawn upon in everyday talk when people express opinions, argue and debate (Potter, 1998). These discursive resources include interpretative repertoires—defined as a set of metaphors, arguments and terms—which are used recurrently in people's discourse to describe events and actions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Some DA researchers prefer to refer to these as themes or tropes. They also include the identification of specific discursive strategies and devices that people mobilize in their talk to build their accounts as factual, objective and disinterested (Potter, 1996). For example, a common device to warrant a particular view or argument is to claim that there exists a consensus on a particular issue, that everybody knows or agrees something to be true. This specific device is known as a 'consensus warrant'. Other discursive resources or tools include rhetorical commonplaces (Billig, 1987) or clinching arguments that participants mobilize in their talk. The use of idiomatic expressions such as clichés or proverbs, for example, has been shown to be difficult to argue against because of their vague but common-sense qualities (Drew & Holt, 1989). Some of these discursive resources and practices will be examined below to illustrate how DP reframes traditional topics through the detailed analysis of text and talk.

Discursive resources that are drawn upon to construct meaning in everyday talk are shaped by social, cultural and historical processes (Wetherell, 2001). People's sense-making practices and ways of understanding the world may vary and shift depending on the particular context, but these are nonetheless constrained by the cultural and linguistic resources that are shared within a particular language community.

Discourse and Identity

Discourse not only constructs objects and versions of the world, it also constructs identities for speakers. Instead of seeing the self and identity as an inner psychological essence possessed by individuals, as in traditional accounts, DP argues that identities or 'subject positions' are brought into being through discourse. Different ways of talking invoke different subject positions for speakers, such as 'mother', 'daughter', 'lover', 'professional woman', 'friend' and so on, so that specific patterns of talk are recognizable for the work they do in discursively constituting identity (Wetherell, 2001). For example, the identity of a 'parent' can be worked up in a variety of ways by the use of culturally recognized narratives in talk regarding parental rights, responsibilities and moral obligations. Unlike the traditional notion of a stable, cognitive self, DP emphasizes the shifting and multiple identities that speakers actively construct in talk (some of which may even be contradictory) to accomplish a range of interactional goals. Discourse is constitutive of identity, that is, people can be positioned by particular ways of talking, but at the same time people can make active choices about the identities they mobilize in particular settings. People are 'constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate' (Davies & Harrè, 1990, p. 46). This account of identity is more in keeping with postmodern and post-structural theories which emphasize the multiple, dynamic and interactive nature of subjectivity.

DA in Action: Justifying Discrimination

To demonstrate these four core principles in discursive research, let's examine an interaction between a member of the public who is asking a prominent politician to justify his opposition to same-sex marriage. Unlike other liberal democracies such as the Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain and Ireland, Australia has yet to legalize same-sex marriage. Within the same-sex marriage debate both in Australia and overseas, pro-gay supporters have frequently attacked the opponents of gay marriage as practising discrimination, in which equal rights are being withheld on the basis of sexual orientation (Harding & Peel, 2006). Opponents of same-sex marriage are thus frequently faced with the delicate task of justifying their position against same-sex marriage, while

simultaneously maintaining egalitarian values and principles, which, after all, form the foundational basis of liberal democratic societies. As we will see in the extract below, opposition to same-sex marriage is typically associated with denials of prejudice and discrimination by constructing opposition to same-sex marriage as outside the boundaries of discrimination (see Matthews & Augoustinos, 2012).

The extract below is taken from the Australian Broadcasting Commission's (ABC) Q & A programme, on 16 August 2010, just days before the Australian federal election, in which Mr Abbott, the then Liberal Opposition Leader, was running for Prime Minister. Here, Mr Abbott is addressed by Mr Thomas, the father of a gay son who questions Mr Abbott's views against same-sex marriage.

Extract: ABC Q&A (ABC, 2010)

- | | | |
|----|--------------|---|
| 1 | Geoff Thomas | Thank you .hhh I am a Vietnam veteran (.) I have been a |
| 2 | | plumbing contractor for 37 years (.) I support with a social |
| 3 | | conscience (.) the Liberal philosophy .hhh I have a gay s↑on |
| 4 | | (.5) when I was confronted with that situation in a very |
| 5 | | short (.) amount of time and with due (.) consideration I |
| 6 | | accepted his position and I overcame my ignorance and my |
| 7 | | fear of (.) of gays and the idea of gay marriage .hhh when |
| 8 | | will you Mr Abbott (.5) take up the sa[audience applause] |
| 9 | | (.) will you sir overcome your fear and ignorance (.) of gay |
| 10 | | people (.3) and give them the dignity and respect (.) that |
| 11 | Tony Abbott | you'd <i>happily</i> give to all other Austral↑ians |
| 12 | | Well Geoff I <i>absolutely</i> agree with you (.5) that people have |
| 13 | | got to be given dignity and respect (.) and I would always |
| 14 | | try to find it in my heart (.) to give dignity and respect to |
| 15 | | people regardless of their circumstances (.) regardless of |
| 16 | | their opinions .hhh uh so that is <i>absolutely</i> my posit?ion (.4) |
| 17 | | <i>but</i> ?I think that uh (.) there are lots of <i>terrific</i> gay relation- |
| 18 | | ships lot::s of terrific (.) uh <i>commitments</i> between gay part- |
| | | ners but I just don't think (.) that (.) uh <i>marriage</i> (.) is the |
| | | right term to put on it. |

Thomas' question contains several interesting features, the most obvious of which is the way in which he renders Abbott's opposition to same-sex marriage as a morally accountable matter. Here, his question can be seen to construct two main realities. First it works to define discrimination as the unfair treatment of the 'innocent'. In this case, Thomas is able to use his subject position of 'abiding citizen' to highlight the injustice of how, despite long years of serving his nation (l.1–2), his family still faces marital discrimination due to his son's sexual orientation (l.1–3). Second, this account attributes discrimination as arising from ignorance and fear: Thomas' personal journey of revelation in which he was previously homophobic but then suddenly 'saw the light' functions to position Abbott's views against marriage as being similarly ignorant and ill informed. Thus, Thomas' account functions to construct the opposition of gay marriage as a form of real-life discrimination, which must be overcome, and results in Thomas questioning whether Abbott will ever change his mind to give gay men, like his son, the 'dignity and respect' (l.9) they deserve.

Abbott's response is structured in a way that conversation analysts have found to be common among interlocutors undertaking a dispreferred response (Pomerantz, 1984). That is, he agrees with Geoff at first (l.11–17), before disagreeing on l.17–18. This kind of discursive work allows Abbott to defend himself from the accusations of prejudice made by Mr Thomas. By initially agreeing with Mr Thomas, Abbott attempts to reassert his identity as a person who is not scared or ignorant of gay people but rather one who also believes in fairness for all. Indeed, from l.11 to 15, Abbott highlights his strong attitudes against discrimination and towards a society whereby everyone is treated the same. The use of words like 'dignity' (l.12,13), 'respect' (l.12,13) and 'heart' (l.12) taps into the ideological resource of morality, in which treating others differentially is seen as problematic and unethical and thus enhances Abbott's self-construction as a person who practices equality. The use of maximization, present in words like 'absolutely' (l.11,14) and 'always' (l.12), anchors the fact that Abbott understands—and 'always' has—the precise boundary line between discriminatory and non-discriminatory behaviour. Furthermore, in l.15,16, Abbott's talk can be seen to positively appraise same-sex relationships through repetitively using words like 'terrific'. This functions to protect Abbott from Thomas' accusations of fear and ignorance and instead situates Abbott as somebody who knows how successful same-sex commitments can be and thus is not ignorant.

Consequently, when Mr Abbott's disclaimer, 'but I just don't think (.) that (.) uh *marriage* (.) is the right term to put it on' (l.17–18), is delivered, it fol-

lows an account that positions him as so opposed to discrimination, that it is impossible to imagine his views as belonging to this category. Instead of refuting Mr Thomas' accusations, which may be viewed as a guilty defence, Mr Abbott instead aligns himself with Thomas' views on equality, thus affirming his disapproval at treating gay people unfairly. Consequently, Abbott's account constructs a reality whereby the prohibition of same-sex marriage simply does not classify as discrimination but is vaguely to do with 'terms' (l.17). Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) refer to this kind of discursive strategy as 'ontological gerrymandering', an accomplishment in which interlocutors 'manipulate a boundary making certain phenomena problematic while leaving others unproblematic' (p. 214).

Similarly, Wetherell, Stiven and Potter (1987) have identified a pervasive discursive resource or practice that participants use to manage such inconsistencies in their discourse, which they called the principle/practice dichotomy. While on the one hand speakers invariably espouse egalitarian principles and ideals, on the other, they are undermined by practical considerations. Such 'practical talk' is deployed in ways that justify and legitimate existing inequities in society. Thus in more naturalistic conversational settings, people articulate a complex set of positions which blend egalitarian views with discriminatory ones. Discursive research of this kind is therefore able to explicate how existing inequities are maintained and reproduced in society despite claims to the contrary.

Notably in the example above, the analysis attends to both the local interactional concerns of the two speakers (their stake and identity as fair and moral beings) and the shared ideological resources that they invoke in their talk to construct specific realities or versions of the world (in this case, what does and does not constitute discrimination). Drawing from CA, we are able to see how people can do 'disagreement' in the most agreeable of ways to fend off accusations of discrimination and homophobia: at the same time, turning to more critical approaches, we can see how liberal individualist principles and values can be deployed in contradictory ways to justify existing inequalities and constrain the rights of minorities. However, CDA may be less interested in how speakers actually do disagreement as a social practice, especially in contexts where their values and identity may be at stake, but rather how resistance to marriage equality is part of a broader discourse of heteronormativity that operates throughout all layers of society. The emphasis and focus in CDA is on the parameters of this discourse, its historical development and its political implications.

Summary

The discursive turn in psychology which began around 30 years ago is a central defining feature of critical social psychology. DA—the systematic study of text and talk—has led to the radical re-specification of social psychology's central topics: topics such as attitudes, social influence, identity, attributions and prejudice. DP rejects the search for internal mental representations and the reliance on internal mechanisms to understand social life. Instead, discourse is seen as *constitutive* and *functional* and hence is claimed to be the proper site of social psychological analysis. Discursive interaction is patterned and ordered, drawing on shared discursive resources such as interpretive repertoires to bring social reality into being and to manage people's identities. Unfortunately, however, social psychology remains largely unaffected by recent developments in DP. The following quote by Holtgraves and Kashima (2008) demonstrates the extent to which mainstream social psychology has remained impervious and blissfully unaware of the discursive turn in psychology.

Many of the processes that are most central to social cognition—attribution, person perception, stereotyping and so on—involve language in some manner. People use language to communicate to one another (and to researchers) their attributions, perceptions, and stereotypes, for example, with language use sometimes shaping the very products being communicated. ... It is, in fact, difficult to think of any social-cognitive processes that do not involve language in some manner. Clearly the study of language can contribute greatly to the understanding of social thought and action. ... Unfortunately ... The role of language has not received the focal attention that it deserves in social cognition. (2008, p. 73)

Hopefully this chapter has demonstrated that this is clearly not the case and that in the last 30 years there has been a systematic and rigorous programme of research that specifically addresses the role of language in social psychology's central topics. Later chapters in this book will demonstrate precisely how this has led to the theoretical and empirical re-specification of such topics.

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