

# Discourse analysis

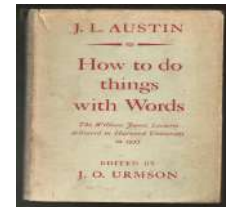
Klaus Nielsen

# Agenda

- A few words about language.
- The field of discourse analysis/three dominant approaches.
- Central concepts when doing discourse analysis: positioning, interpretive repertoires and rhetorical strategies.
- **Focus** on developing a **linguistic sensitivity**.
- Very few linear instructions for doing discourse analysis.

# Another approach to language

- Language “does not merely reflect or mirror objects, events and categories pre-existing in the social and natural world. Rather, they actively construct a version of those things. They do not just describe things; they **do** things” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 6).
- “How To **Do** Things With Words” (Austin, 1962).



# Speech acts

- A speech act is an action performed by the means of language

Ex:

To describe something: "It is snowing outside"

To question something: "Is it snowing?"

Making a request or giving an order:

"Could you pass me the salt", "Drop your weapon or I will shot you"

Making promises:

"I promise I will give it back to you"



# What are we looking for?

- *Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation and decoration [...] (Frederick Nietzsche from “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense”).*
- **How the truth/credible accounts of reality/subject positions are being constructed in the text/talk as stable entities?**



# The Landscape of Discourse Analysis – three positions.

Three significant positions:

1. Discourse analysis/**poststructuralism**.  
Inspired by Foucault (Laclau and Mouffe).
2. **Conversational analysis**. Inspired by  
ethnomethodology (Garfinkel/Schegloff )
3. Discourse analysis/**social psychology**.  
Inspired by ethnomethodology, Wittgenstein,  
Austin (Potter and Wetherell).

# A few words about discourse analysis/poststructuralism

- Inspired by Foucault – the founding father of discursive thinking. Introduces central concepts:
- **Discourse**: are “practices which form the objects of which they speak”
- **Power** is the capacity to 'articulate' and to make those articulations not only 'stick' but become hegemonic and pervasive.
- A focus on how *subjects* are being produced.
- Who are allowed to say what under which (institutionalized) circumstances.

# A few words about discourse analysis/poststructuralism





# A few words about discourse analysis/poststructuralism

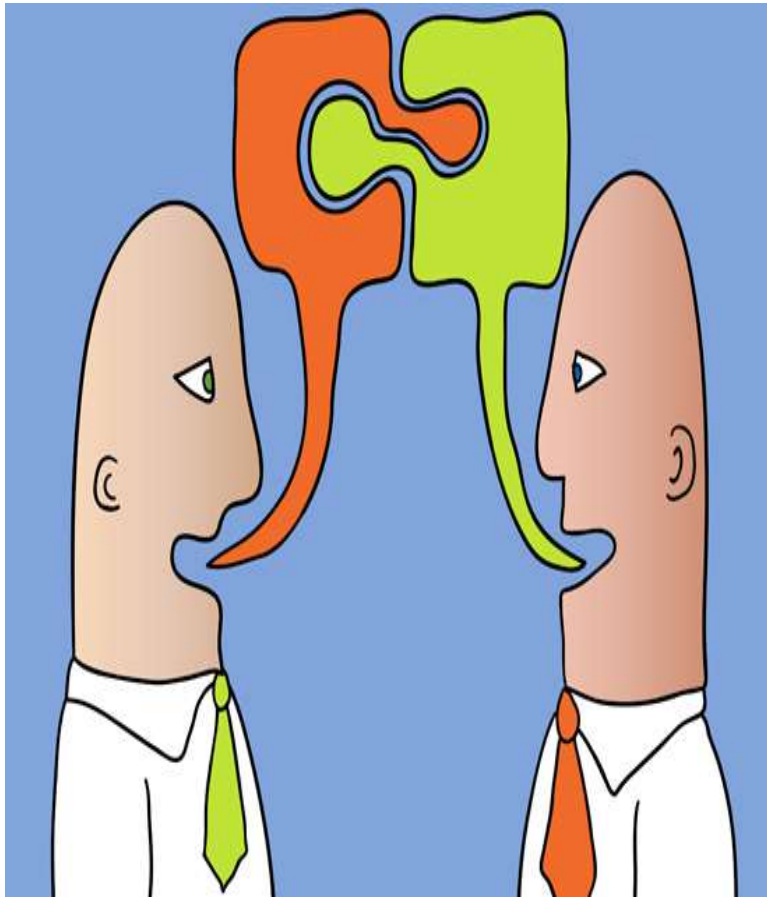
- Macro social constructionism: a strong focus on how gender, race, ethnicity, disability and mental health are being produced.
- Influenced by **structuralism**/the active agent/social interaction does not play a significant role.
- An exception: see Laclau and Mouffe: Discursive articulations and nodal points. The development of stability.

# A few words about **conversational analysis (CA)**

- A strong focus on **talk-in-interaction**.
- Talk-in-interaction represents the prime socio-cultural site. It is the place where culture and 'the social' happen.
- Conversation analysts study the way in which social organization is accomplished in talk.
- Represented by Schlegoff and Sack



# A few words about conversational analysis



- Focus on competence at **turn-taking** and sequencing of talk.
- Turn-taking: We are working together in making conversations work.

# Detailed analysis of conversations

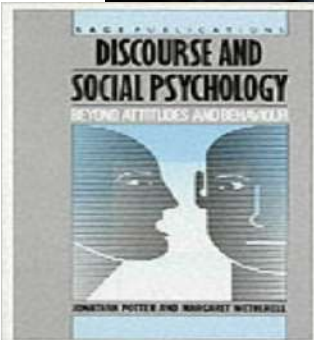
```
01 Voice:   in nineteen hundred it must have been (0.5)
02         fantastic to be able to whiz down the roa:d
03         (0.4)
04 Voice:   on your bicycle.=
05 Music:   =[((gets louder))
06         [((P1 begins to take a drink))
07         (2.2)
08         (1.2) ((P2 turns toward others))
09 P2:      °(      musta been      [  ] °
10 Voice:   [HE::Y I'M FREE
11         (0.2)
12 P3:      °yeah°
13         (0.1)
14 P3:      [°yeah°]
15 P4:      [wha:t?]
16         (0.8)
17 P4:      [what ro:b?]
18 Music:   [ Fade Out ]
19         (0.5)
20 P2:      well it really [mus]t have been ju[st=
21 Video:   [FO ] [FI
22 Music:   [FI
23 P2:      =lib[ating]
24 P4:      [Oh:: ] yeah::
25         (0.2)
26 Voice:   but not everyone [(in the)] home can=
27 P4:      [ yeah:: ]
28 Voice:   =enjoy their freedom...
```

Transcript 1 – The participants' interactions are carefully timed to exploit gaps in the show

# A few words about conversational analysis

- CA usually works with a tiny fragment of social life (verbal interaction) in great detail.
- Very detailed analysis of a part of a conversation.
- Not well suited for analysis of large amounts of interview material. Smaller parts of conversation. Time consuming.
- Critique: "textual empiricism" (Parker, 2005). Excludes power and ideology.

# Introduction/**Discourse analysis** **social psychology**



- Inspired by ethnomethodology, Wittgenstein, Austin.  
(Austin/Searle): “Meaning is use.
- Potter and Wetherell (1987)  
*Discourse and social psychology*.
- Trying to redefine psychological phenomena as part of discursive practices.
- A more **pragmatic** version of discourse analysis.

# Introduction/Discourse analysis social psychology

- *We will use 'discourse' in its most open sense, following Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) to cover all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds. So when we talk of 'discourse analysis' we mean analysis of any of these forms of discourse (Potter & Wetherrell, 2004, p. 7).*

# Discourse analysis social psychology/theory/basic

- People are using their language to construct versions of the social world.
- There is strong focus on **talk-in-interaction**.
- Addressing issues of **power** and **ideology** are being constructed and legitimized in various discourses.
- A strong focus on how people position themselves/are being positioned in various discourses.
- They develop a number of concepts that make discourse analysis accessible.



# Central analytical concepts

- **1. Subject positioning.** (What kinds of positions are being produced/what kind of accounts are being produced).
- **2. Interpretive repertoires** (The social “scripts”/repertoires we use to be accountable)
- **3. Rhetorical strategies** (The use of metaphors, narratives, categories).
- **4. Context.** (What is talk/text a part of).

# Working with the material

Pretty standard:

- Read through the material.
- Code the material (reduction of complexity)
- Search for patterns
- Work inductive – develop hypothesis.
- Look for contradictions/deviant cases.

Using other analytical concepts/posing other questions.

# 1. Subject positioning

- Subject positioning refers to the constitution of speakers and hearers in particular ways through discursive practices.
- “A subject position is a possibility in known forms of talk; position is what is created in and through talk as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as persons” (Davies and Harre, 1990, p. 62).

# Subject positioning

- Different subject positions include certain duties and certain obligations.
- We are often juggling a large number of positions at the same time:  
boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife,  
colleague/friend etc.
- Positions and power: a strong focus on how different positions are offered, accepted and resisted in everyday talk and interactions.

# Teresa interview/example of subject positioning

- McMullen's analysis of the Teresa interview: How is misfortune constructed in the texts?
- How is the psychology of resiliency constructed in the texts?
- How do the participants "do resilience"?

# Teresa interview

When I met new people, I no longer introduced myself as a singer, which was strange for me. Now, I was a psychology major, and I told people this as though I had always been. I suddenly had non musician friends, which was also odd, yet strangely refreshing. I was having conversations that I never had the opportunity for in my previous life; my friends now were philosophers, scientists, poets, and historians, and I was learning of a life beyond the hallowed catacombs of practice rooms, voice studios, and recital halls. On top of that, I took up fencing, motorcycling, rock climbing, and theater acting, and seemed to do pretty well. Frankly, I just wanted to live as much as I possibly could, and do everything imaginable while I was at it.

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# Teresa interview

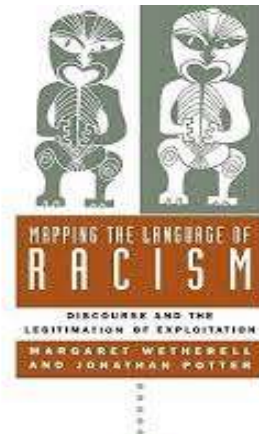
- Nearly all sentences begin with "I" followed by an action verb.
- This **repeated use of similar sentence structure** works to emphasize Teresa's point about agency.
- Other people are occasionally mentioned, but only as the generalized other (roles) and are seen as re-active.

# Teresa interview

- Teresa is positioning herself as an independent (and exceptional) agent in charge of her own life.
- She is "doing resilience" by using a specific cultural narrative about resilience as individual exceptionality.
- A reproduction of a strong Western narrative about resilience.
- The importance of others are diminished as a part of this narrative.

# Mapping the Language of Racism/positioning

- Wetherell, M. & Potter, J. (1992). *Mapping the Language of Racism. Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation*.
- Wetherell and Potter (2002) carried out open-ended interviews with a total of eighty-one white inhabitants in New Zealand.
- Central themes in the interviews were issues of rights, the nature of racism, essential features of Maori-culture and the likely future of New Zealand.



# Mapping the Language of Racism

- *Interviewer: Yeah, Yeah, so it's part sort of immigration, it's related to immigration?*
- *Jones: Umm, Yeah, seeing them (Maorie) coming through off the aircraft at night, half of them can't speak English, um (.). If they can't speak English they're not going to be able to get a job, they're going to go and be in their little communities and (.) they're not going to contribute anything to the country. And they're going to get frustrated and they're going to get bored. And they're going gonna, you know, there's nothing for them to do so the kids are going to start hanging around in the streets. At home Mum and Dad can't speak English and so the kids can't speak English. They go to school and suddenly they are confronted with English – 'we can't speak that, and so what do we do?' – nothing (...)* (Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p. 96).

# Mapping the Language of Racism

- Apparently, Jones constructs an objective narrative about how the Maoris come into trouble in New Zealand.
- The narrative positions the Maoris as being lazy and unintelligent.
- By constructing an apparent objective narrative about the Maoris, Jones positions himself as non-racist, and he remains in a position as a serious speaker.
- Power/ideology?

## 2. Interpretive repertoires

- According to Wetherell and Potter, we have repertoire to interpret or make sense what is being said.
- An interpretative repertoire is a culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognizable themes, common places and tropes (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

# Interpretive repertoires

- Teresa interview: She is using the interpretive repertoire of the artistic wunderkind who due to unforeseen circumstances (the disease) never realized her potentials.
- Jones interview: He is using the repertoire of the observing reporter just stating the facts.

# Interpretive repertoires

- I'll give some examples of how interpretive repertoires.
- They are all about using **nature** as an interpretative repertoire.
- Nature is considered to be fundamental, unchangeable, and stable.
- Give examples of different rhetorical strategies.



# Interpretive repertoire 1: Natural talents and hard workers

- Research study at the Academy of Music.
- Interviews and participant observations
- *How to learn to play piano/learning artistic skills.*
- Strong divisions between natural talents (genius) and the hard worker.



# Interpretive repertoire 2: Natural talents and hard workers

- *well, I must say that there are 2 kinds of pianists. There are those who play like a trained monkey ... who just play the pieces over and over and can get quite far with that. And then the other, the more creative, and who practises creatively but you can hear that they are real talents, right, and ....sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between them when you just hear people play a single piece, you can become quite good at playing a few pieces, and then I think there are far too many at the Academy who get by with the 15 - 20 pieces which they have learnt at the Academy (Erik, p. 79).*

# Metaphors (Categories about classes)

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# Contradictions

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# Institutionalized practice and practical implications

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# Why boys are better at chess

- "In the beginning of human history (i tidernes morgen) the male had to be able to read the patterns of how the animals moved in order to catch something to eat. He should be able to look and say: 'if the animal was here yesterday, I can catch it tomorrow', where the women instead back in the camp were strengthening their social intelligence".
- Albert Gjedde, Politiken, 10th of February, p. 3.

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# Interpretive repertoires 3: about gender and chess

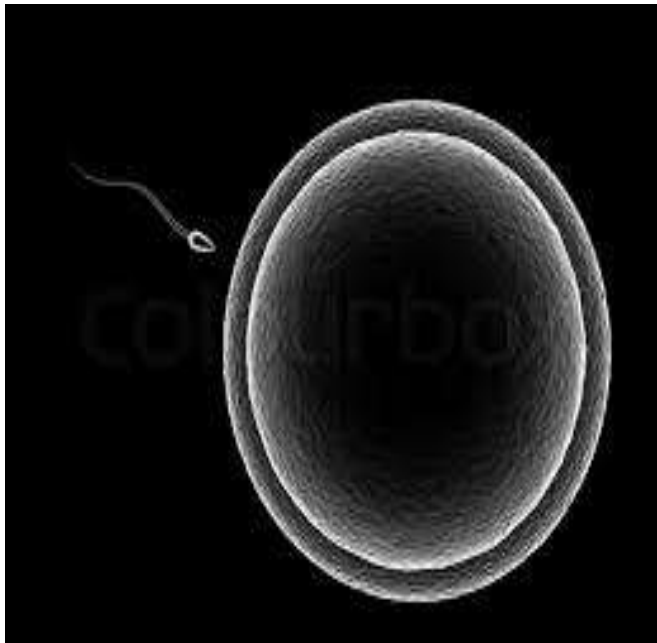
- The article needs an expert to give an account
- The expert positions himself as scientist by giving an account about human nature.
- The interpretive repertoire is constructed from the evolutionary narrative about the natural division of labor between men and women (central categories).
- Men are active (hunters/smart) and productive, women are doing the nurture thing (smart in another way/social intelligence)



# Interpretive repertoire 4: The gendered fairytale in Biology

- Emily Martin. The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles. *Signs*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Spring, 1991), pp. 485-501
- A study of textbooks describing human reproduction

# The Egg and the Sperm



The Egg is “large and passive”, “it is passively transported”, “it is swept or even drifts along”.

# The Egg and the Sperm



- Sperm are small, "streamlined and invariably active". They "deliver" their genes to the egg, "activate the developmental program of the egg".
- Their tails are "strong" and efficiently powered. Together with the forces of ejaculation, they can "propel the semen into the deepest recesses of the vagina." For this they need "energy" "fuel" so that with a "whiplashlike motion and strong lurches" they can "burrow through the egg coat" and "penetrate" it.

# Interpretative repertoire: Cinderella/gendered narrative

- Emily Martin:  
Cinderella's  
transformation as the  
interpretive  
repertoire of the egg  
and sperm story in  
Biology textbooks.



- The interpretative  
repertoire: using  
cultural narratives



# Rhetorical strategies

- Rhetorical strategies are linguistic procedures that are particularly effective to perform ‘fact construction’ - procedures that makes a particular truth seem credible and/or difficult to undermine (Liebert and Gavey, 2009).
- A kind of linguistic building blocks

# Examples of rhetorical strategies

- Narratives/coherence (Jones/Teresa)
- Repetitions of particular structure (Teresa)
- Use of categories (gender, class) taken for granted/organizing the accounts.
- Context (institutionalized practice).
- Variability (why is this person saying this in this context)
- Metaphors (pictures)

# What are we looking in the talk/text?

- Tracking the emergence of different and often **contradictory** or **inconsistent** versions of people, their characters, motives, states of mind and events in the world - and asking why this (different) formulation at this point in the strip of talk/text?
- Remember the premiss: **How the truth/credible accounts of reality/subject positions are being constructed in the text/talk as stable entities?**

# Contradictions

- Why the consistent pattern of inconsistency between Teresa's self-account and her account of others (the Teresa interview)?
- How can the main teacher at the Academy of Music claim that there is a significant difference between two groups of pianists and at the same time find that it is difficult to hear a difference when they perform?



# Contradictions

- Why include an apparent strong gendered social division of labor from pre-historical time to understand why boys are better at playing chess than girls?
- Why the strong resemblances between gendered cultural narratives and biological accounts for human reproduction in biological textbooks when it comes who are active and who are passive?

# Group work

- Analyze a part of an interview using a discourse analytical perspective.
- Be sensitive to how certain accounts/positions are being linguistically produced.
- Focus on contradictions/inconsistencies.
- If possible, focus on how positioning/interpretive repertoires/rhetorical strategies are being used in the construction process.
- Give examples.