

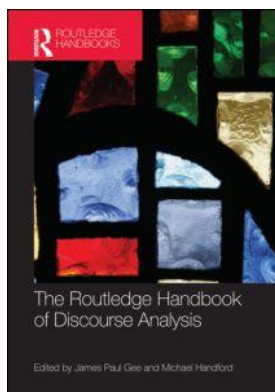
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Publisher: *Routledge*

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The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis

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Discursive psychology and discourse analysis

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203809068.ch8>

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Published online on: 16 Nov 2011

How to cite :- Jonathan Potter. 16 Nov 2011, *Discursive psychology and discourse analysis from: The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis* Routledge

Accessed on: 30 Sep 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203809068.ch8>

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Discursive psychology and discourse analysis

Jonathan Potter

Discursive psychology is an approach that addresses psychological matters in terms of how they figure in discourse – in conversations over family mealtimes, in therapy sessions, in witness statements. It begins with psychology, as it confronts people as they live their lives. How does a speaker show that they are not prejudiced, while developing a derogatory version of an entire cultural group? How is upset displayed, understood and receipted in a call to a child protection helpline? How does a parent show that they care for a disabled daughter while they close down a phone call? How does a police officer move between technical and mundane notions of intention when interviewing a suspect? The point here is that psychology is something that is live and visible as it appears in and through discourse, as actions are performed and receipted. This is not just through psychological language – psychological predicates and avowals – although that is interesting and important, but through styles of speaking, through inflection and prosody, through descriptions that invoke and suggest psychological states and dispositions and through the apparatus of accountability that builds motivation and intention. All of this works through, and is dependent on, the normative organization of conversation, whose operations are themselves a major resource for psychological display and understanding. This is why discourse analysis must be at the heart of a reconfigured psychology.

Discursive psychology (henceforth DP) is a systematic and comprehensive alternative perspective to more traditional psychological approaches such as psychoanalysis, behaviourism and social cognition. It is focused on how psychological objects, orientations and displays are parts of discourse practices. The focus is on discourse practices as they appear naturally in everyday and institutional settings. These practices involve talk, but that talk is coordinated with embodied action and often responsive to, or reworking, texts (documents, files, computer fields and so on). Developing this perspective has necessarily involved a radical reworking of the nature and boundaries of the ‘psychological’; part of its excitement has been the way an entirely new vision of psychology has started to crystallize.

It has also required a shift in methodology to an approach that takes seriously the nature of human discourse. It has been crucial to move away from the ‘telementation’ picture of language as a conduit sending ideas from one mind to another, as Harris (1981) so memorably described it, to a view that starts with the practical, action oriented role of discourse. The methodological principles of DP follow from its conceptualization of discourse as a basic medium of action rather than as an abstract system of description. This methodological innovation has built on more familiar critiques of experimental and survey methods in psychological research, but has taken methodological

development in rather different directions. In particular, DP has increasingly drawn on the methods and conceptualizations of conversation analysis as they provide the most powerful approach available for analysing the way actions are performed in talk.

DP starts to address psychology in this way because discourse is the primary currency for action, understanding and intersubjectivity. DP is very different from the psychology of language, which tends to treat language as one variable among many. It starts with a view of people as social and relational and with psychology as a domain of practice rather than abstract contemplation. Although discourse research is often stimulated by broader theoretical considerations, one of the ironies of DP is that in its careful, descriptive focus on discourse it offers something of the observational science that classic experimental psychology often claims as its own.

This chapter will introduce the perspective of discursive psychology. It will start by offering a brief history of DP and its relationship to discourse analysis more broadly, as well as to the contemporary discipline of psychology. It will then outline some of the basic elements of a DP approach, highlighting links to the perspective of constructionism and conversation analysis. Following this, it will briefly sketch the basic methodological principles of DP and describe three research studies that highlight what is distinctive about this approach with respect to key psychological topics that fall within the more familiar psychological categories of cognition, attitudes and emotion. It will end with a brief review of contemporary debates and future developments.

The development of discursive psychology out of discourse analysis

Discursive psychology emerged from Potter and Wetherell's (1987) influential volume *Discourse and Social Psychology*. This in turn drew on, and offered an integration of, conversation analytic work (Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Levinson, 1983), post-structuralist arguments from Barthes, Derrida and Foucault and, crucially, work in the analysis of scientific discourse that was part of the broader sociology of scientific knowledge (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). These disparate strands were held together through an emphasis on: (a) the careful empirical study of discourse; (b) the manner in which discourse is oriented to action; and (c) the way representations are built to support actions.

Many of the features that are central to discursive psychology were outlined in Potter and Wetherell (1987). However, there are two important differences from that earlier work. First, Potter and Wetherell had as their major focus the identification and nature of the structured resources that underlie and sustain interaction. These include membership categories (Hester and Eglin, 1997), rhetorical commonplaces (Billig, 1987 [1996]) and, most notably, interpretative repertoires. Potter and Wetherell refined the notion of interpretative repertoires from Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) earlier work on scientific discourse. Interpretative repertoires are clusters of terms organized around a central metaphor, often used with particular grammatical regularities. They are drawn on to support different actions. In Lawes' (1999) work on marriage talk, for example, speakers used a 'romantic' repertoire to justify their commitment to marriage, while they used a 'realist' repertoire to justify and explain marriage breakdown and divorce. The same speaker might draw inconsistently on both repertoires at different times to support different practices. The notion of interpretative repertoire has now been used in a large number of research studies (see, for recent examples, Stevens and Harper, 2007; Hernandez-Martinez *et al.*, 2008; Juhila, 2009).

The virtue of this analytic notion is its ability to capture complex, historically developed organizations of ideas that could be identified through research. Interpretative repertoires accommodate to the flexible requirements of social practice and thus offer greater analytic purchase than some neo-Foucaultian notions of discourse, which are more brittle and tectonic. The ideological

role of this flexibility was highlighted by Billig *et al.* (1988), who noted the way flexible and dilemmatic forms of accounting can be ideologically more powerful than more crystallized alternatives. For example, they studied the way educational ideologies work in classroom situations. Although traditional approaches that stress learned outcomes seem very different from progressive approaches that value the way pupils come to their own understandings of the world, Billig *et al.*'s analysis shows that teachers work with both ideas of education as they manage classes and work toward specific outcomes. Techniques are used that generate specific outcomes (e.g. cueing certain kinds of answer, ignoring others) but the whole practice is described as pupil-centred and progressive. The contradictions at the level of ideology in the abstract become central, flexible strengths at the level of practice. For methods-focused pieces on the analysis of repertoires, see Edley (2001) and Potter (2004) and the original how-to-do-it chapter in Potter and Wetherell (1987).

Despite the virtues of this analytic notion, Wooffitt (2005) has suggested that the notion of interpretative repertoires misses the full complexity of human conduct. In particular, he raises the question of whether the way repertoires are patterned is a consequence of preformed conceptual organizations or a by-product of the pragmatic organization of practices (see Potter, 1996, ch. 6). Furthermore, the original repertoire notion required a series of procedures and criteria for the reliable identification of forms of talk and text as a repertoire. Yet current studies sometimes offer only a vague account of how repertoires are identified and of how they relate to a corpus of data (Potter, 2003).

The second area of difference between Potter and Wetherell's (1987) conception of discourse analysis and the later discursive psychology is the use of open-ended interviews. The majority of the many studies using interpretative repertoires have used open-ended interviews to generate data. Such interviews lend themselves to the production of talk that can be analysed for interpretative repertoires; so they can be part of a productive research strategy. However, discursive psychology is distinct from the earlier tradition of discourse analysis in almost completely abandoning open-ended interviews in favour of a focus on records of talk in natural settings. In part, this was a consequence of the profound problems that arise in the production and analysis of open-ended interviews (Potter and Hepburn, 2005). Most importantly, however, it is due to the excitement and creativity that comes from working with records of people actually living their lives in either everyday or institutional settings. I will say more about this below.

Despite these major differences, there are some important continuities between Potter and Wetherell (1987) and discursive psychology. Both draw heavily on the constructionist sociology of scientific knowledge and on the revitalized rhetoric of Billig (Billig 1987 [1996]). Both focus on categories and descriptions and on the way these are involved in actions. And both offer a respecification of basic psychological notions.

Theoretical principles of discursive psychology

Discursive psychology is usefully understood as working with three fundamental observations about the nature of discourse. Discourse is (1) oriented to action; (2) situated sequentially, institutionally and rhetorically; and (3) constructed and constructive. These observations structure analytic work in DP. I will take them in turn.

Discourse is action orientation

DP starts with a focus on discourse as a central resource for performing action. These may be relatively discrete actions, which have speech act verbs associated with them – invitation,

complaint, say – or they may be complex, institutionally embedded practices where no speech act verb exists – using questions to give ‘person centred’ advice, perhaps. Often actions are done indirectly, via descriptions of some kind that provide a different kind of accountability for the speaker than an ‘on-the-record’ speech act. The key point is that discourse is studied for how action is done rather than treated as a medium for access to putative mental objects (intentions, dislikes). This is a very different startpoint from that of cognitive psychology, which was largely born out of an engagement with linguistics, and more specifically out of a concern with grammatical structure and abstract semantics (Potter and te Molder, 2005).

Discourse is situated

A central recognition of DP is that actions are situated. The most profound way that action is situated is in terms of the here and now of conversational sequence. Talk is *occasioned*. This point is at the heart of discursive psychological research practice. When we move from language as an abstract system that has a static and abstract relation to the world and to mental organizations to an action-focused approach, we are immediately considering the way events unfold in real time. As Heritage (1984) emphasized, talk is context dependent in that it picks up from, and responds to, the immediate conversational context; and it is also context reproducing in that it builds a new context for whatever talk is immediately following. For example, when an offer is issued, this sets up the environment for various relevant next actions, most relevantly acceptance or rejection. Note that, if the offer is ignored, this will be the action of ignoring the offer; it will be heard in relation to the offer. Moreover, by doing acceptance or rejection, the speaker is displaying an understanding of the offer as an offer. Conversation analysis has highlighted the extraordinary detail and specificity in which interaction is organized (Schegloff, 2007).

A second major way in which an action is situated is institutionally. DP does not adopt a position of contextual determinism; it does not treat all interaction in a doctor’s surgery, say, as intrinsically medical. Nor does it treat institutional talk as organized into coherent, conceptually organized discourses, such that medical settings will implicate a medical discourse or register. Instead DP focuses on the way the coherence of medical talk, say, comes from the regular collection of interactional tasks that are being managed. However, these institutional tasks are often dependent on broader practices that have been utilized or refined in institutional settings (Potter, 2005). However, institutional talk is typically oriented to pervasive institutional identities, which in turn may be invoked, oriented to or subverted in different ways.

A third major way in which an action is situated is rhetorically. This came out of the early engagement with Billig’s (1996) rhetorical psychology. It highlights the way that descriptions are often organized to counter actual or potential alternatives – and organized in ways that manage actual or possible attempts to undermine them (Potter, 1996). A major theme in DP is the way epistemic issues are managed using a wide range of conversational and rhetorical resources (Potter and Hepburn, 2008).

Discourse is constructed and constructive

Discourse is constructed from a range of resources – words, categories, rhetorical commonplaces, grammatical structures, repertoires, conversational practices and so on, all of which may be delivered in real time, with prosody and timing, or is built into documents with specific layouts, fonts and so on. These resources, their use and their conditions of assembly can become topics of DP study. They are both resources for action and challenges that may require management in order for one to work round their specific affordances.

Discourse is constructive in the sense that it is used to build versions of psychological worlds, of social organizations and action, and of histories and broader structures. Such versions are an integral part of different actions. DP research can be focused on the way constructions are built and stabilized and on the way they are made neutral, objective and independent of the speaker. People are skilled builders of descriptions; they have spent a lifetime learning how to do it. Part of the analytic art of DP is to reveal the complex and delicate work that goes into this seemingly effortless building. For example, how does one party in a relationship counselling session construct a version that presents the breakdown of a long-term relationship as primarily the responsibility of the other party; that is, how might one party produce the other as the one most in need of counselling and therefore under most pressure to change (Edwards, 1995)?

This kind of constructionism is different from cognitive constructionisms, which focus on the way mental images of the world are assembled through processes of information processing. It is also distinct from a range of social constructionisms, which focus on the way individuals are produced with particular constellations of subjectivity through processes of socialization and through the internalization of social relations. In DP the procedures of production are treated as analysable elements in themselves – they do not require the analyst to delve into a putative mental space. Whereas cognitive constructionisms tend to focus on purported mental entities and processes and social constructionists tend to focus on social relationships and social perception, the constructionist focus in discursive psychology is on people's practices, and particularly on how versions are constructed.

A further major principle of DP is that the space of psychology itself is not a natural object in the world, but is a major issue that participants manage. Consider the topic of evaluations (traditionally, attitudes and opinions in classic social science approaches). An evaluation can be built as a personal preference, something that the speaker is accountable for, or as a feature of how the world is – not something that the speaker feels or wants but a feature of the world that they notice. For example, a negative evaluation of a minority group can be built using descriptions that present that group's actions as negative, but present the speaker as actually sympathetically disposed. In this way speakers can manage possible attributions of racism. In contrast, a strongly positive assessment of some food that has been cooked by the host can be built as a personal attitude or disposition. Edwards (2007) calls these 'object side' and 'subject side constructions'. A major part of the production of talk and of the psychological attributions that go along with it can have the function of managing the production of object and subject side. Before illustrating some of these principles with research examples I will outline some of the basic methodological procedures of DP.

Methodological procedures of discursive psychology

Although there are some differences of emphasis, contemporary DP draws heavily on the methods and approach of conversation analysis (for more detail, see Chapter 3 in this volume). A typical DP study will work with a set of audio or video recordings collected in some setting. Recent work has used phone calls to neighbour dispute mediation service, calls to a child protection helpline, video records of family mealtimes. Researchers often draw on more familiar sets of mundane records of phone interaction to do primary or comparative work.

Such materials will be digitized and often transcribed in one pass by a transcription service that is meant to capture the basic words and speaker transitions. This can facilitate searches through material for particular themes or events of interest. Often these are generated through data sessions in which a number of researchers engage with a single example, with repeated viewings or listenings, and this stimulates preliminary ideas that lead to a search for new examples. Such a search can start to build a preliminary corpus of examples. These are typically transcribed using the

system developed by Gail Jefferson (2004), which captures features of delivery that are oriented to by participants – overlap, volume, prosody – in a way that makes them visible on the page (see ‘Transcription Conventions’ at the end of this chapter and Hepburn and Bolden, in press, for a fuller account). Analysis and data sessions, however, typically work with both video/audio and transcript; the latter is not intended to replace the former. Unlike in more traditional social psychological work, specific research questions are rarely developed prior to the research; rather, the research often takes the setting as the key driver of questions (what kind of practices go on in a neighbour mediation helpline?) or works with a broad orientation to materials (in what sense can we find practices of advice giving in these helpline calls?).

A study will commonly work with a flexible corpus of examples. As analysis develops, the corpus will be refined. Some examples will be abandoned and new examples will be recognized, and therefore included in the corpus. The corpus will often start with standard cases and try to explicate them, and then consider deviant or counter cases, which may provide further specification of the phenomena. With interactional materials the orientations of the participants themselves are a primary analytic resource, as these display their understanding of what is going on in its most basic way. Heritage (2004) suggests that participants orient towards interaction in at least three ways. First, they address themselves to immediately preceding talk. Second, they set up the conditions for the action or actions that will come next. Third, in the production of next actions, participants show a set of understandings of the prior action: that it is complete, that it was addressed to them rather than someone else, what kind of action it was and so on. This matrix provides for the intelligibility of interaction that is crucial for participants and offers an extraordinarily rich resource for analysts.

In what follows I will take two contemporary discursive psychological studies. I will use them to illustrate the various theoretical and analytic features of this style of research. They will also, very loosely, illustrate the way DP respecifies basic phenomena of cognition and attitudes.

Studies in discursive psychology

Intention: institutions and practices

Ideas of intention have had a range of different roles in the social sciences. One of the most influential is probably in the field social cognition, where the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) has been associated with more than a thousand articles in the last two decades. This theory treats intentions as the product of a number of different elements, which work in combination to affect behavioural outcomes. Intention is treated as a kind of mental push that will result in the person engaging in the actual behaviour, unless something intervenes to prevent it. Some philosophers have criticized this kind of approach to intentions by offering a conceptual analytic picture of intentions as a language game for making distinctions between different kinds of actions (e.g. Austin, 1961).

Rather than engage in such conceptual analysis, Derek Edwards (2008) opts for an approach that considers intentions through considering the practical use of attributions of intention, of the term intention, and of intentional language more broadly. He notes that actually there is a very wide range of semantic and grammatical resources that can be used to denote that something was intended or done intentionally. Thus words such as *kick* imply agency, while words such as *fall* imply passivity or something that happened without intending. And the different grammatical resources can upgrade, cancel or modify the agency in some way. To limit analysis further as a basis for developing a collection of examples, he chose to focus on cases where the intentionality of an action was specifically topicalized by reference to a mental state. Edwards’ first search is through a

corpus of everyday UK mundane telephone conversations in which family members (and friends and acquaintances) chat to one another, make arrangements and transact their day-to-day business.

As a first observation, Edwards notes that intentionality is rarely topicalized in everyday talk of this kind, except where there is some difficulty – something has been impeded or has had to be postponed. Take the following example.

(Holt:1:4:2)

- 1 Les: → What time did you inten' getting here Keith.
 2 (0.3)
 3 Kei: Uh:: (1.4) pr'obly about uh:: ten o'clock.
 4 h's [train co]mes[in
 5 Les: [Well the-] [the trouble is you see uhm (1.1)
 6 uhh! (0.2) You better haa- (0.3) There's a- uh- (.)
 7 aga:p,h (0.2) when: I'm out'n she's out but if you're
 8 early enough you c'n go with her I thi:nk, (...)

Leslie's query about Keith's arrival time (line 1) can be seen to be prompted by the prospect of trouble, which is introduced in line 5. However, Leslie signals the potential for trouble right in line 1 by using the term intention – things would be very different if she has simply said 'what time are you getting in?'. As Edwards puts it:

The very notion of an intention to do something, as something worth formulating, makes relevant a potential a gap between thought and action.

(2008: 180)

And Keith has clearly picked up that there is a looming problem as he delivers the time of arrival in a softened, delayed and hedged manner, preparing the way, perhaps, for a cooperative modification in plans. Edwards goes through a range of further examples that use terms that suggest intentional mental states (think, like), concluding that the formulation of baulked preferences or intentions is part of a standard conversational organization, familiar in conversation analysis, where invitations and offers are routinely declined. His conclusion is that intentionality is a major element in the building of accountability for failed actions (or ones that have been, or are, likely not to be realized) and is a resource that people use for the performance of conversational actions done in the telling (2008: 182).

This is the backdrop for an examination of the way notions of intentionality figure in police interrogation. The data here are a collection of British police interrogations recorded by the police themselves, as part of their process of evidence gathering and case building. His first observation is that, in contrast to the mundane materials, intentionality is a pervasive concern, and a concern that is not restricted to a focus on failed or baulked actions. Typically some degree of intent is a key criterion for the status of the suspect's action as a crime. However, the notion of intent is interestingly extended. In English law there is a distinction between *actus reus* (the actual illegal action) and *mens rea* (the criminal intent); conviction will depend on the prosecution showing both of these things. And the *mens rea* can vary from full premeditation to recklessness with regards to consequences. Edwards suggests that recklessness would not be part of a more everyday notion of intention; yet in legal settings 'recklessness is raised and negotiated alongside, and in terms of, intent and intentional states' (2008: 183).

Take the following example. The suspect has been accused of damaging a car following a row, and he has already admitted that he 'smashed the car up'.

- (PN:2:2)
- 1 P: You said, (.) smashed the car up.
 2 S: Well. (.) smashed the back window.
 3 P: What'd (y'hit.)
 4 (1.3)
 5 S: I [punched the window.]
 6 P: [(To get into)] the car.
 7 (0.3)
 8 P: Punched the back window.=
 9 S: =Yeh.
 10 (3.7)
 11 P: Hh okha:yh h
 12 (2.0)
 13 P: → What was y'r pur:pose when y'punched the window,hhh
 14 (0.6)
 15 S: Take th'temper outa me.
 16 (0.2)
 17 S: (_Th*at's *all_)
 18 (1.9)
 19 P: *R:*ight
 20 (0.7)
 21 P: → Did you inte:nd to cause any damage to the
 22 window of the car,
 23 (0.4)
 24 S: *No not really,*
 25 (0.3)
 26 P: No,

Edwards suggests that across the range of interrogation examples the police work to parse events into action, effect and intent. The interrogator works to establish not only what the suspect did (in this case, punch the window), but also what the effects were (the window was broken) and what degree of intent there was with regard to those effects. Note how, having established a description of the action, the police officer moves to the issue of intent. The design of the question presupposes that the punching was done for some purpose. The suspect in this case avoids this presupposition by citing the role of the punching in terms of managing his mental state – it was to ‘take the temper out’ of him. Having unsuccessfully established intent with a relatively open WH-question, the interrogator pursues the issues of intent with a yes/no interrogative on 21. This move from open to closed forms of questions was recurrent in the corpus.

In this case the questions have not succeeded in eliciting the required admission of intent from the suspect. The police officer moves to an approach that, Edwards notes, is also recurrent in the corpus, which involves the use of normative and hypothetical reasoning.

(continued from previous)

- 27 (0.4)
 28 P: Ri*:ght*
 29 (2.1) ((papers rustling))
 30 P: → What d'you think the likely outcome is if you punch
 31 a window of a carhh.

- 32 (0.5)
 33 S: °Could sma:sh,°
 34 (0.3)
 35 P: It could sma:sh
 36 (1.7) ((papers rustling))
 37 P: → °Kay.° Did you think about that risk before you-
 38 punched it,
 39 S: *Didn't think about anythin:°
 40 (0.5)
 41 S: (*Punched it.°)
 42 (0.3)
 43 P: Righ'.
 44 (1.1)
 45 P: But you're aWA:RE that by punching something
 46 there's a risk.
 47 (.)
 48 P: By punchin' a window there's a risk of it breakin'.
 49 S: °*>Ye:h<°

Note the way in line 30, after the suspect has denied having the intention to break the window, the police officer builds a normative and hypothetical question – what is the likely outcome *if* you punch *a* window? Moreover, the question asks about the suspect's mental state – what do you *think*? As in the earlier extract, the officer moves from an open WH-question to a yes/no interrogative in 37–38. When this is unsuccessful, the interrogator again issues a hypothetical that links punching a window to it breaking, this time eliciting agreement.

Edwards' general observation is that the interrogations are an institutional setting that draw on, but refine, everyday practices of managing intentionality. Thus they go beyond the everyday appearance of intention when actions are baulked to being an overt topic closely related to issues of criminal responsibility. The analysis highlights some of the practices through which such intent is built: separating action, intention and effect; moving from open WH-questions to yes/no interrogatives; asking hypothetical questions. Unlike in the theory of planned behaviour, intention here is not treated by the analyst as the driver of behaviour, but is taken as a member's resource within particular everyday and institutional settings. That is, rather than being a practice of cognitive analysis, the discursive psychological analysis here is focused on participants' cognitive ascribing of practices.

Attitude: caring and closing

One of the major areas of historical and contemporary social psychology is the study of attitudes. Indeed attitudes are a commonplace of work from across the social sciences. The discursive psychological critique of the way attitudes were conceptualized was developed right from the start (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, 1988; Potter, 1998). It emphasized that evaluations were part of practices embedded in interaction, where they played particular roles. And it emphasized that evaluations are often produced by constituting the 'attitudinal object' in particular ways rather than by claiming a personal psychological position. Indeed it highlighted the importance of producing neutralism rather than an attitudinal stance for some, socially particularly controversial, topics (Potter, 1998). We have already touched on this above.

Another feature of this developing critique of attitude work is that it starts to break up the idea of a single underlying attitudinal dimension in favour of considering the way different kinds of evaluations can be produced for different purposes. For example, Wiggins and Potter (2003) highlighted the different roles of 'objective' and 'subjective' food evaluations – 'that pasta is lovely' vs 'I love that pasta.' And, as I have already noted, Edwards (2007) has highlighted the possibilities of people constructing subject side or object side descriptions.

This move to break up unitary dimensions of evaluation in favour of considering specific kinds of evaluative practice can be developed further. I will consider a particular example, where certain kinds of evaluation are at stake. Specifically, how does a parent show he or she *cares* in conversations with a young adult with a learning disability?

This study by Anne Patterson and Jonathan Potter (2009) worked with a corpus of more than 50 calls between a young adult with a diagnosed learning disability and different family members (mother, father, grandmother). The young adult was staying in a residential placement. While the young adult was away from home, these phone calls were her main way of staying in touch. The particular focus was the way the calls closed. This had two virtues. First, call closings are a site where the issue of the relationship between parties may become live. When a speaker initiates call closings, this is a potentially disaffiliative action where the 'motives' of the speaker may become relevant – are they bored? Do they dislike the other party? Closings are an occasion that may require delicate management. Second, call closings have been a topic of standard conversation analytic scrutiny. Conversation analysts have identified a robust set of organizational features that contribute to the orderly nature of closings (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). From a discursive psychological point of view, this normative organization can provide a kind of natural laboratory in which to study the trickling of psychological matters into talk.

An initial observation about this corpus is the way the calls unfold differently from the typical closings in the literature. Schegloff and Sacks (1973) found a robust pattern of closings, built out of two adjacency pairs:

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | A: Oright | <i>Offer to close</i> |
| 2 | B: Okay [honey | <i>Acceptance</i> |
| 3 | A: [bye dear= | <i>Terminal exchange</i> |
| 4 | B: =bye | <i>Terminal exchange</i> |

The first (lines 1 and 2) comprises an offer to close and an acceptance. The offer to close indicates that the speaker has nothing else to add and it offers a free turn to the other, should that person wish to add anything. The acceptance indicates that the second speaker has nothing to add either, and so participants can move to terminal exchanges, which is the second adjacency pair shown here in lines 3 and 4. Crucially, this organization allows both for the smooth transition to closing and for the insertion of further talk. At the point where the offer to close has been delivered, the recipient can add more talk, and this addition of further material can go through a number of iterations, each orderly provided for by the offer to close.

The collection of calls that Patterson and Potter studied was immediately striking in three ways. First, it maintained the general form identified by Sacks and Schegloff. Second, it showed a massive recycling of the closings. The authors compared the number of offers to close in their corpus and in a standard mundane corpus, widely used in conversation analysis research. They found that in the mundane corpus most of the calls had one or no sequences in which offers to close were made; however, in the family corpus most of the calls had three or four initiations of closings that did not result in an immediate closing but rather in the insertion of more talk. Third, the closings typically had a considerable amount of material inserted into them not found

in standard mundane closings. Most commonly what was inserted were accounts for leaving the call.

Take the following simple example.

(R210505)

- 1 **Sue:** Carrie ↓went with me
 2 **Dad:** Good.
 3 (4.5)
 4 **Dad:** right. >well
 5 I'm going to go now< darlin'. *Announcement*
 6 → >cus I've got lots of< teeth to make. *Account*
 7 **Sue:** yea::h
 8 → I've got to finish ma cards off=*Account*

In this extract, after a brief delay (the kind of thing that often prefigures a pre-closing), Dad announces his intention to go and therefore close the call. However, unlike in the more minimal standard form, this announcement is accompanied by an account. Note the detail here. Dad specifies a task that he has to accomplish (he is a dentist). The strength of the account is marked by the 'got' construction. Moreover, it is built, as is common in this corpus, from conventional resources that specify the constraining role of work, school, meal preparation, or the television schedules. Accounts of this kind make leaving the call a *requirement*, and in this way the speaker reflexively produces him or herself as *reluctant* to do so. Accounts do delicate relationship sustaining work. In particular, they build the speaker's care for the other.

The example above has a simple pattern; often the closings were built with a much more complex relational structure, in which the parent or aunt would build an account for call closure by focusing on material in the recipient's environment.

(A220505)

- 1 **Mum:** >You're going to be an idn-< indep↑endent?
 2 young la:dy aren't yer an' i- it's great
 3 to talk to mum: but there'll be times
 4 when y-.h you'll think,
 5 ↓(ooh:?: I want to ↓do my own ↑thin:g:,
 6 (1.7) ((TV in background))
 7 **Sue:** ↓Yea:h:.
 8 (0.3)
 9 **Mum:** ↑Ye:ah?
 10 (1.5) ((TV noise in background))
 12 **Sue:** Strictly- >is it?< the uh:m:, is i' th- a-
 13 >I can hear it in the< backgrou:nd:=
 14 **Mum:** O:kay- >did you want to go *Interrogative*
 15 → and try and< wa:tch it. *Candidate Account*
 16 (0.9)
 17 **Mum:** [D'y' want ↑to:?:?] *Interrogative*
 18 **Sue:** [M u m: m y:I ↓h]aven't voted for Sadie,
 19 I haven:t.

What is striking here is that Mum, who initiates the closing, provides an account for some action that Sue will need to perform. In this case, the interrogative form allows the offer to close to be

built as an orientation to the *other's* requirement to go. Material is available in the call that *could* be used to account for closing, but has not *yet* been formulated in this way. Thus Sue appears to be fending off a request from a party outside the call for her to go to supper. Mum follows this with an interrogative that asks Sue if she wants to leave the call to get supper and watch the rest of a TV programme.

In psychological terms, a complex piece of relational business is transacted here. Mum builds a candidate account for Sue to leave the call. She displays care for the Sue's 'wants'. Both parties are built as wanting to stay in the call, but required by television and food timetables to leave the call. This is particularly delicate business, as there is a strong emphasis in interaction on parties having rights over their own psychological states (Heritage and Raymond, 2005). There is a further feature of the design of accounts for the other. They construct reasons for going that focus on the needs and interests of the other party. In the example given the focus is on a favourite television programme. This adds a further element of caring. It is not just that pre-closing is treated as accountable and that one party produces an account for the other, it is that the account is built as responsive to, and protective of, the needs and interests of the other.

What we see in these examples is the way 'caring' is built interactionally. Pre-closing is an environment where motivation and other psychological states become alive. Participants orient to this both through the placement of accounts just at the point where closing is projected as the next action and through the form of accounts (highlighting the obligations on each party).

Standing back, we can see the difference of approach here from the standard psychological and social cognition take on attitudes. Rather than seeing Mum, say, as having a particular attitude to Sue, we see that the issue of her stance or evaluation becomes alive at key interactional moments, such as when a phone call is being ended. At this point accounts can be produced (for self and for other) for closing the call that build a stance of caring. This discursive psychological approach starts with psychological matters as they are built and displayed in discourse. The analysis focuses on action orientations (to close a phone call), on how these actions unfold sequentially (in a structural position in the call), on how they are constructed (out of a range of conventional and linguistic resources) and on how they construct features of speaker's and recipient's psychology.

Contemporary debates and prospects

Discursive psychology has stimulated, or been part of, a series of debates in the last decade. These can helpfully provide further definition for the approach. These debates focus on the status of interview data in comparison to studies of naturalistic records, the possibility of combining different methods, the epistemic basis of discourse research, the status of ethnographic work, and the place of the psychological subject in discursive psychology. They are cross-cutting and raise a wide variety of fundamental issues, only some of which can be addressed here.

The relative status of interviews as opposed to naturalistic records has been a source of controversy in the last decade, as researchers increasingly explored the use of naturalistic materials inspired by conversation analysis and the idea of the open-ended qualitative interview as the default option for much of qualitative and discursive research came to be questioned (Silverman, 2009).

There is a cluster of related issues with respect to the analysis of interviews for discursive psychological research and the status of interviews data. The virtues of interviews as a method

for accessing participants' interpretative repertoires are: (a) they allow the researcher to focus on particular topics or themes; (b) questions can be designed to provoke the use of different interpretative resources in relation to a single topic or theme; (c) they allow a degree of standardization of questions across different participants; (d) they allow for more control in sampling. Clearly, these virtues are not negligible. However, there is a range of limitations and problems: (a) they are inevitably flooded by the expectations and categories of particular pre-existing social science agendas; (b) interviews abstract participants from their location in particular settings, where they have a specific stake and interest in ongoing actions; (c) they are hard to analyse, as the footing of the participants (as representative category member, as objective observer) is often unclear (this is partly a local analytic challenge and partly a function of the 'offstage' recruitment process, which is often crucial for setting up relevant memberships). These advantages and limitations are explored in two illuminating debates (see Potter and Hepburn, 2005 and responses; and Griffin, 2007 and responses; see also Potter and Hepburn, in press).

It is important to emphasise that the main thrust of discursive psychology since its origins as a specific variant on discourse analysis has been to work with naturalistic materials. The reason for this is not that qualitative interviews have been found wanting. Indeed, some of the most striking critical observations about qualitative interviews have been developed after the founding of the discursive psychological project. Instead discursive psychology has been invigorated by the excitement and surprise of working directly on records of people living their lives. Social life is organized with more granularity and is ordered much more profoundly than many alternative social and discursive approaches assumed. In addition, people show a more subtle practical understanding of one another than other traditions of work suggested; and these understandings are often lost in the process of analysis in the typical study of open-ended interviews.

Hammersley (2003) has argued that both conversation analysis and work in the tradition of Potter and Wetherell (1987) have epistemic commitments at odds with most other forms of social science and reject a focus on the individual actor and on his/her powers and competences. He argues that both of these traditions should best be seen as supplements to other styles and methods of work, notably ethnography. More recently Corcoran (2009) has developed some similar points about the epistemic commitments. In both cases, the critics have failed to appreciate the thoroughgoing constructionism in discursive psychological work. This is attentive to the complex role of descriptions, glosses, accounts, formulations, categories and so on as a basic element in social practices, and as such it retains a methodologically sceptical stance with respect to the simple, referential nature of these things (Potter, 2003, 2010). In its reflexive attention to methodological issues and its close coordination of theory, object and analysis, the constructionism of discursive psychology has developed a distinct methodological position. This strives to bestow the same careful attention to participants' business in all its specifics as they evidently display themselves.

Although Corcoran (2009) and others have suggested that discursive psychology fails to offer a full picture of the psychological subject, this is comparing the project of discursive psychology with earlier psychological approaches and failing to appreciate how radical the current project is. It is a radical social psychological perspective that starts with discourse – actions done through talk, gesture and texts – and puts participants' own practices and understandings at the centre of its project. It aims to explicate the subtleties of emotion (Edwards, 1997; Hepburn and Potter, 2010), for example, and the way subjectivity can be a contested space (Hepburn and Potter, 2011). It is unpacking psychology as a lived practice from the outside in.

Transcription Conventions

Um :	Colons represent lengthening of the preceding sound; the more colons, the greater the lengthening.
What it <u>i:s</u>	Underscoring represents words or parts of words delivered with stress or emphasis
I've-	A hyphen represents the cut-off of the preceding sound, often by a stop.
↑Mm↓hmm	Vertical arrows precede marked pitch movement, over and above normal rhythms of speech.
.,?	Punctuation marks show 'normal' intonation, not grammar; period, comma and 'question mark' indicate downward, 'continuative', and upward contours respectively.
hhh hh .hhP (h)ut	An 'h' represents aspiration, sometimes simply hearable breathing, sometimes laughter, etc.; when preceded by a superimposed dot, it marks in-breath; in parenthesis inside a word it represents interpolated laughter.
hhh[hh .hhh] er[I just] (certainly) (slurred voice)	Left brackets represent point of overlap onset; right brackets represent point of overlap resolution.
(0.2)	Single parentheses mark problematic or uncertain hearings; double parentheses include additional transcriber's comments.
(.)	Numbers in parentheses represent silence in tenths of a second; a dot in parentheses represents a micro-pause, less than a tenth of a second, hearable but too short to easily measure.
°mm hmm°	Degree signs enclose significantly lowered volume.
Ri*:ght*	Stars enclose talk delivered with 'creaky' voice.
<u>_Th*at's *all_</u>	Underlines enclose talk that is delivered with flat intonation.

Note: For full details on the transcription see Jefferson (2004).

Further reading

Edwards, D. (1997). *Discourse and Cognition*. London and Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

This book highlights the interplay of discursive psychology, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis with a range of analyses of psychological matters. A major work that outlines the basic features of discursive psychology by reference to how it manages topics such as categories, scripts, emotions, narratives and shared knowledge. It rewards close study.

McKinlay, A. and McVittie, C. (2008). *Social Psychology and Discourse*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

This is an up-to-date and comprehensive exploration of the relationship of discursive psychology to social psychology. It follows the format of a major social psychology textbook, but provides an alternative approach to each topic area. It is extremely clear.

Potter, J. and Hepburn, A. (2008) 'Discursive constructionism', in J. A. Holstein, and J. F. Gubrium (eds.) *Handbook of Constructionist Research*. New York: Guildford, pp. 275–293.

This highlights the constructionist elements of discursive psychology. It shows the way discursive psychology and conversation analysis can be combined to address constructionist issues in a systematic manner.

Hepburn A. and Wiggins S. (eds) (2007). *Discursive Research in Practice: New Approaches to Psychology and Interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This collection showcases a range of interaction analysts addressing psychological questions. It includes basic pieces on issues such as emotion and subjectivity and particular studies that address topics such as medical communication, sex offender therapy gender reassignment and troubled eating. Taken together, the contributions illustrate a different way of going about psychology.

Wooftitt, R. (2005). *Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis: A Comparative and Critical Introduction*. London: Sage.

An excellent critical overview of these two traditions of work and of how they relate to one another. It offers useful background to the above and clarifies tricky and confusing issues about the range of approaches that make up discourse analysis and how conversation analysis and discursive psychology sit with them.

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