Studying Discourse Processes in Institutional Contexts

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Introduction

Institutions are structures or regularities in social behavior that are self-perpetuating or self-policing. They are a central element of human social life. Examples include organizations (like corporations, small or medium enterprises, churches, armies, and the like), professions (which regulate behavior of their members through ethical codes), and markets (which regulate behavior of actors through supply and demand or conventional means of exchange like currencies). Institutional reality expresses itself through cognitive (taken-for-granted shared beliefs), normative (binding social obligations), and regulative (e.g. legal sanctions) aspects (Scott, 2003). It is now widely recognized that discourse is a central and constitutive element of institutions. It is through discourse that the daily business of institutions is conducted, and so it is through discourse that institutions are enacted and reproduced in everyday life (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004; Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammers, & Vaara, 2015). As a result, research on discourse processes in institutions can reveal much about how institutions function. At the same time, such research can also lead to a better understanding of the nature of discourse processes, not least because even activities like everyday conversation are constituted by regularities like rules, norms, and conventions, all of which imply some degree of institutionalization.

In particular, given the many kinds of social change occurring in recent years, it is important to understand processes by which institutions emerge and decline, and discourse plays an important role in such processes (Fiol, 2002). It is via discursive processes that institutions lose the taken-for-granted status that legitimizes them (Werner & Cornelissen, 2014), and, conversely, it is also through discursive processes that the possibility and desirability of change gets legitimized. The ever-increasing spread of new technologies for communication has enabled discursive processes across multiple institutional contexts as never before, thus changing both the nature of discourse and of institutions. Discourse processes in institutions
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have become more interactive, faster paced, more informal, more flexible, and more intertwined with other activities. It is important to understand the implications of these changes for institutional functioning and for the study of discourse and communication.

In keeping with the overall framework of this handbook, one can thus ask how discourse processes in institutional contexts have changed in the past years. The scope of such a question is very broad. “Institutional contexts” potentially encompasses any kind of situation where individuals interact in institutionalized roles or about institutional topics. Examples range from doctor-patient communication (Roter & Hall, 2006), humor during team meetings (Lehmann-Willenbrock & Allen, 2014), the multimodal conduct of auctions (Heath & Luff, 2013), or metaphors produced by employees to describe a merger between two banks (Vaara, Tienari, & Säntti, 2003). As these examples suggest, “discourse” is also a notoriously polysemous concept ( Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Van Dijk, 1997a). In the work represented in this Handbook, “discourse” refers to two main research traditions. One tradition studies cognitive processes of comprehension and production of various kinds of spoken and written discourse. Researchers in this tradition typically stem from cognitive psychology, educational psychology, psycholinguistics, computer science, and neuroscience and employ mainly experimental and quantitative methods. An alternative tradition studies social and cognitive processes involved in conversational interaction. Researchers typically also stem from psycholinguistics, but also from pragmatics, sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, and ethnomethodology. Clark (1992) refers to these traditions in the study of language as the product versus action traditions. In a similar vein, Van Dijk has edited two classic volumes on each of these traditions (1997a, b). For the purposes of this chapter, we call them the discourse-production-and-comprehension and the discourse-and-social-action traditions. These traditions are of course interrelated. Discourse production and comprehension processes are part and parcel of everyday social interaction. For example, characteristics of the language production and comprehension system may affect the coordination of turn-taking in conversation (De Ruiter, Mitterer, & Enfield, 2006).

On the whole, the discourse-production-and-comprehension and the discourse-and-social-action traditions are not primarily concerned with understanding discourse in institutional settings. However, everyday social interactions overwhelmingly take place in the context of institutions of various kinds. As such, they are influenced by the specific aspects of the institutional context. At the same time their very performance contributes to creating and reproducing such institutional realities. This reciprocal link between discourse and institutions has attracted much scholarly attention in organization studies, the interdisciplinary field dedicated to understanding the processes inherent in organizing or coordinating collective human activities. Scholars in this area typically come from management science, organizational behavior, and organizational sociology. We refer to this area of research as the discourse-and-institutions tradition.

It would seem obvious that these three “grand” traditions would have much to learn from each other, and indeed there has been some cross-fertilization between them. However, it is no easy task to gain an overview of their potential interactions because they are studied by researchers from different disciplines, who often work from different methodological and epistemological premises. Levinson (2006a, p. 39) writes that the study of social interaction is spread out over an interdisciplinary “no-man’s land.” For example, experimental psycholinguistics (a prominent representative of the discourse-production-and-comprehension tradition) relies on rigorous experimental control, sophisticated technologies (measurement, brain imaging), and complex statistical analyses to investigate production and comprehension. At the same time, conversation analysis (a prominent representative of the discourse-and-social-action tradition)
eschews experimental research and statistics (Schegloff, 1993), preferring to study naturally occurring interactions and situations and focusing on detailed transcription and analysis of examples of real conversations (but see De Ruiter & Albert, 2017). This state of affairs is unfortunate, because researchers in these traditions often are interested in similar phenomena (Levinson, 2006b). Research in the discourse-and-institutions tradition could learn much from more basic research and methodological innovations in both the discourse-production-and-comprehension tradition and the discourse-and-social-action tradition. At the same time, research in the discourse-production-and-comprehension tradition and the discourse-and-social-action tradition could be informed by a more sophisticated understanding of the complex and often subtle nature of institutional realities and their effects on discourse – indeed, research focusing on individuals communicating in interaction has often neglected the effects of macro-level, structural phenomena that are the mainstay of the discourse-and-institutions tradition (Lammers & Barbour, 2006).

The purpose of this chapter is to begin to remedy this state of affairs by charting these three traditions, as well as the specific research paradigms they have engendered, in order to create a background upon which new developments in the study of institutional discourse can be mapped. To our knowledge, there currently exists no review which relates these three traditions. We undertake this task by proceeding in three steps, organized around the central map that is depicted in Figure 3.1. First, in the second section, we describe the three grand traditions of research on discourse: the discourse-production-and-comprehension tradition (Figure 3.1, left) the discourse-and-social-action tradition (Figure 3.1, middle), and the discourse-and-institutions tradition (Figure 3.1, right). We also selectively describe specific research paradigms that have been emerging within these grand traditions, in a variety of blended approaches, since the 1980s. These approaches correspond to some of the boxes in Figure 3.1. Upon this backdrop, in the third section we describe examples of concrete topics where pioneering interdisciplinary encounters between these traditions are occurring (these do not appear in Figure 3.1). These topics exemplify how new research developments that typically come from one of the grand traditions can shed new light on classical topics from another tradition. In the fourth section, we conclude by briefly discussing the benefits of connecting these grand traditions for future interdisciplinary research.

The particular framing of this chapter allows for a “big-picture” map of an overall terrain that is often unknown to researchers working in their own specialized traditions, but where various bilateral connections are possible and indeed, as we will show, growing. We try to make as many of these connections as possible in this chapter. The framing also allows for a view of where the future is going. We anticipate this framing to be useful to scholars in all three grand traditions who are interested in looking beyond their own doorsteps, and young researchers who will benefit from having a comprehensive source to hand that can help them forge innovative new research projects. But a caveat is also in order. Throughout this chapter, and especially in the next section, we will use large brush strokes to paint this big picture. This necessarily entails some simplifications, as well as choices about which aspects of a particular research tradition to present and which to exclude. Our aim is to be representative rather than exhaustive. Moreover, because we are interested in links between the grand traditions, we mainly depict approaches that we deem potentially relevant for connections between these traditions. Moreover, we only represent approaches that have made important contributions to the study of discourse itself. Some approaches analyze discourse as a part of overall investigative activities or use discourse to illuminate social processes, but are not specifically dedicated to furthering scientific understanding of discourse per se. We have excluded such approaches from our depiction. An example would be the tradition of computer-supported cooperative work (Olson &
Figure 3.1  Three grand traditions of research on discourse and their relative explanatory foci. Left: The discourse-production-and-comprehension tradition. Middle: The discourse-and-social-action tradition. Right: The discourse-and-institutions tradition.
Olson, 2007), which is concerned with studying how collaborative activities can be supported by technology, but which does not primarily focus on advancing understanding of discourse processes.

Three Grand Traditions in the Study of Discourse

Discourse Production and Comprehension

The discourse-production-and-comprehension tradition focuses on explaining the production and comprehension of discourse, typically by investigating the cognitive representations constructed during production and comprehension as well as the processes that give rise to them (Graesser, Gernsbacher, & Goldman, 1997). It emerged in the 1970s from work in fields like text linguistics, cognitive psychology, pragmatics, education, and artificial intelligence (Graesser, Gernsbacher, & Goldman, 2003). A key issue in discourse comprehension is how prior knowledge and current linguistic input interact, in other words, how knowledge is activated. Classic models emphasized the role of memory processes (Myers, O'Brien, Albrecht, & Mason, 1994) or strategic, goal-driven construction (Graesser, Singer, & Trabasso, 1994). More recent models have integrated these approaches (for a review see, e.g., Sparks & Rapp, 2010). In Figure 3.1, we highlight three aspects of the discourse-production-and-comprehension tradition we find particularly relevant for the study of discourse in institutional settings (without claiming that these are necessarily the most representative research trends in this tradition): situation models, embodied cognition, and computational tools.

Situation Models

Discourse comprehension involves constructing representations of a state of affairs depicted in a text. These representations go far beyond the information given as comprehenders build inferences about key dimensions like space, time, causality, intentionality, or protagonists. These representations have variously been termed situation models (Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998) or mental models (Johnson-Laird, 1983). In organizational settings, team mental models, or the extent to which members of a team share ideas about how to perform a task and each other’s role in those tasks, are important determinants of team processes and performance (DeChurch & Mesmer-Magnus, 2010). Just as individual-level situation models enable inferences and predictions about a text that go beyond the information given, team mental models enable predictions about what other team members are likely to do without the need for overt communication and thus constitute an important element of successful team coordination. Team mental models can be elicited from discourse of individual team members which is then aggregated. An important future direction in this research field is the extent to which team members are actually aware of the extent and limits of what they share with each other and whether this impacts team performance (Mohammed, Ferzandi, & Hamilton, 2010). This seems especially interesting to link with research from the discourse-as-social-action tradition on perspective-taking (Schober, 1993) and the potentially egocentric nature of language production, especially given that team members may tend to overestimate the effectiveness of communication (Chang, Arora, Lev-Ari, D’Arcy, & Keysar, 2010). Related to these developments, recent theoretical approaches tend to conceptualize team cognition less as an aggregate knowledge structure shared by team members, but rather as an interactive activity (Cooke, Gorman, Meyers, & Duran, 2013).
Embodied Cognition

The notion that cognitive processes are grounded in bodily experience is gaining traction in many areas of cognitive science (Gibbs, 2005; Glenberg, 2010). Early work on this notion comes from various origins, but a prominent source relevant for discourse processing is Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) work on metaphors which suggest that they are not just figures of speech, but fundamental influences on thinking. Metaphors rooted in everyday experience are used to understand abstract concepts. For example, time is understood in spatial terms, as in expressions like “the worst is behind us” or “Thursday is before Saturday” (Boroditsky, 2000, p. 5). Our experiences of temporal duration are affected by concurrently presented but irrelevant spatial information (e.g., distance) (Casasanto & Boroditsky, 2008). Another case for the embodied nature of discourse processing is multimodal communication. Gesture and speech are tightly linked, both in production (De Ruiter, 1998) and comprehension (Kelly, Barr, Church, & Lynch, 1999; Kelly, Özyürek, & Maris, 2010). More generally, comprehenders rapidly and incrementally integrate visual and linguistic information from the earliest stages of comprehension (Tanenhaus, Spivey-Knowlton, Eberhard, & Sedivy, 1995), or mentally simulate sentences to derive their meaning (Glenberg & Kaschak, 2002, p. 562). Embodied cognition has a number of potential applications in applied and other institutional contexts (Davis et al., 2012) and the approach resonates with a rich tradition of research on metaphor (Morgan, 1986) and sensemaking in organizational research which has recently started to investigate the material and embodied nature of sensemaking in real-time and natural contexts of decision-making. For example, Cornelissen, Mantere, and Vaara (2014) analyzed the case of a police operation where an innocent civilian was mistaken for a terrorist and shot. They showed how the gesturing between police officers as well as the material cues encountered and artifacts used during the high-risk operation reinforced a framing of the suspect as a terrorist, thereby inhibiting cues that would have potentially favored alternative accounts and led to another course of action.

Computational Tools

Alongside advances in computational linguistics and corpus linguistics, research in the discourse-production-and-comprehension tradition has led to the development of several computational tools to automatically analyze relevant characteristics (e.g., cohesion) of a large corpus of texts. A relatively well-known package is LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) (Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001). Latent Semantic Analysis is both a theory and an automated method for analyzing knowledge representation in texts (Landauer, Foltz, & Laham, 1998). More recently developed, Coh-Metrix (McNamara, Graesser, McCarthy, & Cai, 2014) computes a range of metrics in written text, including cohesion indices. These metrics can be used flexibly to study high-level features of text that capture aspects like rhetoric or discourse strategies. Computational tools have great promise for investigating discourse in institutional contexts. For example, there is a vibrant research tradition in organizational research on the discourse of leaders, especially using speech transcripts (Bligh, Kohles, & Meindl, 2004; Fiol, Harris, & House, 1999; Klein & Licata, 2003). A recent study using LIWC and Coh-Metrix to analyze speeches of three autocratic leaders (Mao Tse-Tung, Fidel Castro, and Hosni Mubarak) after natural disasters (Windsor, Dowell, & Graesser, 2014) revealed the strategies those leaders used to apportion blame and claim credit to ultimately further their own interests. In the future, the further development of data science technologies will enable flexible and automatic analyses of large bodies of
in institutional texts for evidence of higher-level discourse processes. This in turn may even lead to the possibility of tracking processes of institutionalization and de-institutionalization as social movements unfold in real time.

**Discourse and Social Action**

This tradition investigates the production of discourse as a form of coordinated social action, as a means to perform social actions, or as a vehicle for expressing power relations in society. A primary site of investigation is the use of language in naturally occurring, everyday conversation. Seminal work in the 1950s and 1960s was conducted in the philosophy of language in the form of speech act theory. The main proponents of this approach took issue with a positivist view of language according to which its essential function is to produce true or false statements. Austin (1962) developed the notion of a performative utterance, the meaning of which is neither true nor false, but a means by which one can perform an action, such as naming something, promising, apologizing, or agreeing to marry someone. Austin further noted that utterances often perform several actions at once, distinguishing between locutionary (the ostensible meaning), illocutionary (intended meaning), and perlocutionary (the obtained effect) aspects of utterances. Philosophers of language have tackled the problem of how it is possible to recover the intended meaning of an utterance, which is often only loosely related to the linguistic meaning. Grice (1975) proposed that conversational participants adhere to a cooperative principle, according to which utterances produced in a conversation are presumed to be intended to further the conversation. Grice decomposed the cooperative principle into conversational maxims of quality, quantity, relevance, and manner. Using these maxims, participants are able to infer intended meaning from what is actually said, arriving at various kinds of implicatures. Searle (1975) further developed this issue in his theory of indirect speech acts.

Taylor and Cooren (1997) used Searle (1975) to argue that there is a certain class of speech acts that, when used by individuals, may have a formative role and effect in attributing agency and actorhood to a collective reality, i.e., an organization or institution, and with such an organization or institution in turn being recognized by the individuals involved as a legitimate expression of such agency – with the utterance of the speech act and its acceptance constituting the “organization” or “institution.” Specifically, Taylor and Cooren (1997) draw on Searle’s notion of declaratives, as speech acts, that are not only self-referential (in declaring that an organizational figure or institution exists and is attributed with agency) but the act itself also executes the very reality that it promotes to exist. Declarations are “speech acts where the illocutionary point of the speech act is to change the world in such a way that the propositional content matches the world, because the world has been changed to match the propositional content” (Searle, 1989, p. 541). Declarations thus have simultaneously what Searle (2010) calls “world-to-word” and “word-to-world” directions of fit: i.e. the world changes to match the word, and the word is a faithful representation of the world. This double link is, as Searle (2010) claims, essential to a joint commitment to a socially created world or reality, such as an organization or institution.

An example of the force of declaratives in creating social reality and instigating collective action is illustrated in a study by Quinn and Worline (2008) into the events aboard United Airlines Flight 93 (one of the planes hijacked in the September 11th attacks). A passenger aboard the plane had realized the hijacking was a terrorist suicide attack and declared (to others) “it is a suicide mission.” In this way, he marked the reality that they were in as being different from a “normal” plane hijacking and hostage negotiation. At first, people
aboard the plane struggled to accept his declaration in part because they had no precedent for “airplane hijackings being used for suicide missions” (Quinn & Worline, 2008, p. 506). Yet, gradually the declaration became legitimized and accepted, as “by sifting through data, seeking confirmation, questioning and debating, people could become increasingly certain about the accuracy of Tom’s narrative for the duress” (p. 507). Accepting the common reality, people then collectively declared themselves an organizational “actor,” or force, to counter-attack the hijackers.

At the same time as the developments in speech act theory, sociologists were discovering face-to-face interaction. Erving Goffman made pioneering contributions to the understanding of self-presentation and facework (1955), conversation and talk (1961), and the interactional management of negative identity (1963). Goffman’s work revealed how everyday talk constitutes a social institution along the lines of other kinds of institutions (organizations, markets, and the like) and described the practices by which this so-called interaction order operates (Heritage, 2001). Moreover, his work on frame analysis (1974) has been seminal in organization studies and sociology (e.g., Benford & Snow, 2000). Another pioneer in sociology, Garfinkel (1967) developed the project of ethnomethodology, which advocated investigating the shared understandings and everyday practices members of social groups use to make sense of their experience and create social order.

These seminal developments in the philosophy of language and sociology impacted a number of prominent scholars in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, Grice’s (1975) work has influenced Levinson’s important textbook on pragmatics (1983), and was reinterpreted by Sperber and Wilson (1986). Goffman and ethnomethodology paved the way for the development of conversation analysis from the late 1960s onward (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). And influences from Goffman, Grice, and conversation analysis are clearly identifiable in Clark’s theory of grounding and language use (1996), which focuses both on social and cognitive processes in everyday conversation.

Communication and Cognition

Under this label we group landmark works in the fields of pragmatics and the psychology of language. A common denominator of these works is the link between cognition and social interaction, in other words, how cognitive processes enable everyday social interaction. As such, they are heavily influenced by Grice’s work, and deal with the implications of the cooperative principle, especially the assumption that mutual knowledge is a prerequisite and result of successful communication. Many of these works are also close to the discourse-production-and-comprehension tradition, insofar as they focus on comprehension and production with little emphasis on the study of real conversation (or insofar as they attempt to explain conversational phenomena by appealing to cognition). For this reason, in Figure 3.1, the communication-and-cognition box is near to the left side of the figure. A first example is Brown and Levinson (1987), who, building on the work of Goffman on face, offer an account of indirect communication by which indirectness results from the use of politeness strategies in order to mitigate the face threats associated with performing various interactional moves. A second example is Sperber and Wilson (1986), who flesh out what they call an inferential model of communication (building on the work of Grice in particular), by which communication involves “producing and interpreting evidence” (p. 2), with such evidence being primarily about recognizing the intentions of the speaker. Their work proposes that intentional communication “carries a guarantee of relevance” (p. 50), i.e., that the very act of communication is an indication to the audience that what is being
said is intended to be relevant. Relevance is a powerful principle that organizes the search for speaker meaning that is crucial to comprehending discourse. Sperber and Wilson’s (1986) work is notable in its rejection of the mutual knowledge assumption. Another prominent work in the communication-and-cognition label is Clark’s (1996) book, which summarizes important aspects of his and his colleagues’ work on mutual knowledge or common ground as an important aspect of conversation. Unlike many other cognitive approaches, Clark’s (1996) theory of language use is somewhat of a “cross-over” in that it is heavily influenced by conversation analysis.

Interactive Alignment and Egocentric Processing

In the 1990s and 2000s, the question of mutual knowledge in conversation became more controversial. Keysar (1997) proposed that much research on common ground is flawed because experiments do not take into account a potential confound between the common ground and the speaker’s egocentric perspective. By designing experiments which separate these two components, it should however be possible to show that speakers’ initial utterance design is essentially egocentric (i.e., does not take into account audience design; Horton & Keysar, 1996). These findings have also been criticized (Metzing & Brennan, 2003). The debate has since then increasingly focused on exploring the processes that influence whether communicative utterances are designed by speakers with the audience’s perspective in mind (Horton & Gerrig, 2005; Knutsen & Le Bigot, 2012). A recent product of this debate is the constraint-based model (Hanna & Tanenhaus, 2004), which proposes that participants in dialogue rapidly interpret information from different sources as it becomes available (information on a conversational partner’s perspective being one such source) and use this information to generate probabilistic evidence for competing interpretations. Pickering and Garrod’s (2004) interactive alignment model is a mechanistic approach to explain the interactive phenomena inherent in dialogue. These researchers propose that much of coordination in everyday dialogue is achieved by the alignment of participants’ situation models and other levels of dialogue processing (syntactic, lexical) via an automatic priming mechanism.

Conversation Analysis (CA)

CA emerged from initial work between Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson in the 1960s. Via qualitative micro-analyses of detailed transcripts of naturally occurring conversation, CA seeks to account for the procedures by which participants in conversation co-construct organized social action (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). A seminal paper was Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson’s (1974) treatment of how participants in conversation allocate turns at talk among themselves. CA has systematically described a range of other fundamental conversational phenomena, like the adjacency pair as a basic element of conversational structure (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), how problems are repaired (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977), or how preferences are organized, notably the preference for agreement or acceptance (e.g., Pomerantz, 1984). More recent developments in CA have included a move toward investigating talk in institutional settings, using the CA approach to illuminate how institutions function. This program was outlined in a landmark volume in 1992 (Drew & Heritage, 1992). Since then, CA has been used to explore many institutional processes. In a recently edited handbook (Sidnell & Stivers 2012), chapters focus on psychotherapy, medicine, classroom talk, courtroom talk, and news interviews.
Critical Discourse Analysis and Discursive Psychology

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a wide-ranging approach to the study of relations between discourse and social power. It emerged from a range of intellectual precursors, including Marxism, the Frankfurt school of critical theory, and Foucault’s works (van Dijk, 2015; see Figure 3.1). CDA tries to address social problems related to power relations, dominance or inequality by exposing the discourses by which such relations are enacted, for example through the analysis of right-wing political discourse (Wodak, 2015) or discourse about gender relations (Wodak, 1997). As such, it is close to the concerns of the discourse-and-institutions tradition and thus appears near the right side of Figure 3.1. Discursive psychology was originally developed at the University of Loughborough (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This movement is influenced by conversation analysis and ethnomethodology, but also rhetoric and the sociology of science. It is sharply critical of mainstream cognitive psychology, advocating a redefinition of the classic phenomena of psychology (e.g., memory, attributions, emotions) as social actions accomplished in and through discourse when people try to construct accounts to justify actions or project a particular identity.

Interacting With and Through Computers

This domain of research concerns two areas of human-computer interaction that we refer to as interacting through computers, i.e., interacting with other human beings via technological interfaces (e.g., computer programs, videoconference facilities) and interacting with computers designed to mimic human interactional partners. In both areas, investigations have benefited from advances made in models of discourse processing and communication and cognition. For example, in interacting with other humans through computers, researchers have analyzed the differences between real-time, face-to-face conversation and various media on the grounding process (Clark & Brennan, 1991). This in turn has led to efforts to mimic informational and interactional affordances available to physically co-present partners (Nardi & Whittaker, 2002) that are not available to remotely communicating partners, such as the sense of perspective conveyed by visual information (e.g., Gergle, Kraut, & Fussell, 2013). The potential gains of interacting with computers that mimic human interactional partners are large. Animated agents that are able to engage humans in reasonably realistic conversations can potentially attain outcomes comparable to those attainable via interactions with human representatives (at a much lower cost) in many institutional situations like learning and instruction (Graesser, Jeon, & Dufty, 2008), survey interviewing (Conrad & Schober, 2008), or health care interventions (Bickmore, Pfeifer, & Jack, 2009). This potential can be realized in part due to the natural tendency for humans to interact with computers in an anthropomorphic fashion (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007). Given the increase in computing power in recent years, it has become possible to endow animated agents with quite advanced adaptive capacities. Accordingly, research efforts have focused on potential benefits of increasing the naturalism of interactions with such agents, for example by investigating whether spoken versus written dialogues lead to better learning (D’Mello, Graesser, & King, 2010). In the future, many more social interactions between individuals and institutional representatives will be either mediated by technology or replace the human representatives themselves.

Workplace Studies

This is an approach within the sociology of work. It is concerned with the investigation of how “tools and artefacts feature in the accomplishment of practical organizational conduct”
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(Heath, Knoblauch, & Luff, 2000, p. 308). Workplace studies draw on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis to describe how social interactions in the workplace are situated and contingent, and how material tools and technology are interwoven with those interactions. Workplace studies are typically critical of the assumptions of mainstream cognitive science and human-computer interaction and seek, like conversation analysis, to investigate naturally occurring situations. Many of the investigations in workplace studies are based on fine-grained multimodal analyses using video-recording (Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010) with the goal of accessing details of the social organization of work that normally escape analytical focus. For example, a classic study (Hindmarsh & Heath, 2000) investigated the multimodal referential practices of operators in a telecommunications control room, showing how referential practices like precision-timed pointing gestures enabled mutual orientation to relevant information in the course of work activities, and how the referential activity was only intelligible in the context of those activities.

Communities and Conventions

This body of research goes beyond the implicit focus on dyadic conversational situations typical of the communication and cognition approach. The goal is to investigate how repeated interaction among members of a community leads to the emergence of linguistic conventions that are more robust than the conceptual pacts (Brennan & Clark, 1996) elaborated by dyads. Seminal research by Garrod and Doherty (1994) used a task that required participants to coordinate movement through a maze in a series of repeated games. Participants either always played the game with the same partner or repeatedly switched partners within a “community.” In the community condition, participants initially took longer to converge on a conventional scheme for describing positions in the maze, but by the end of the experiment, convergence rates were higher than for isolated pairs. This finding suggests that conventions can evolve through repeated interactions among members of a community of language users and has important implications for the study of language emergence and change. Focus has since shifted to studying how abstract symbolic systems can emerge from communication that is initially iconic (e.g., highly idiosyncratic and detailed line drawings of referents) via social collaboration, as opposed to simple linear transmission (Fay, Garrod, Roberts, & Swoboda, 2010) or showing independent effects of cognitive change and collaboration on the emergence of symbol systems (Healey, Swoboda, Umata, & King, 2007). In a recent review, Garrod and Galantucci (2011) described progress in this field, now known as experimental semiotics. Research on communities and conventions has much potential for application to understanding initial moments in the development of conventions, and thus for elucidating the foundations of institutional emergence.

Discourse and Institutions

Within the field of organization studies, the subject of institutions and institutionalization has since the 1970s led to a vast and growing stream of research. This stream of research consists of studies that are wedded to various theoretical traditions and camps – or “institutionalisms” – ranging from work on institutional myths, frames, and logics to research in the tradition of institutional work. At the same time, these studies are all part of a broader neo-institutional turn which, in its entirety, holds a central position within the social sciences today (Davis, 2010; Scott, 2003), and is prominent in academic fields such as sociology, and management and organization studies.
Whilst neo-institutionalism may be a broad church encompassing various theoretical traditions, these traditions have traditionally primarily focused on individual and collective cognition as an explanation of the macro-level features of institutions (DiMaggio, 1997). This cognitive focus distinguishes the new institutionalism from the “old” institutionalism (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997), and has since the 1970s led to a considerable body of work exploring shared thought structures, or cognitive representations (labeled as frames, categories, templates, schemas, mental models, logics, myths, or scripts), that constitute the legitimate ways of talking and acting socially in particular social or organizational settings (Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006). A core assumption is that identifying such individual and collective representations gets at the heart of institutional reality where “the psychology of mental structures provides a micro-foundation to the sociology of institutions” (DiMaggio, 1997, p. 271).

**Representational Approaches to Institutional Discourse**

Because of its primary focus on individual and collective cognition, research on institutions has traditionally considered discourse as a “window” into cognition as it exists in a social setting or field at a particular point in time. Schneiberg and Clemens (2006, p. 211) suggest that the common measurement strategy among neo-institutional researchers has been “to use actors’ discursive output as topics for analysis, that is, as documentation of cognitive frames, principles, or institutional logics.” For example, Jones et al. (2012) recently analyzed the vocabularies of keywords used by movements of architects as they started to frame and define the emerging field of modern architecture. “Modern functional” and “modern organic” architects pronounced and underscored different conceptions of modern architecture and between each other started to promote their own vocabularies, as a code for their design practices. Loewenstein et al. (2012) similarly developed a theory of institutions as captured in, and represented by, vocabularies: collections of words and expressions that coherently interrelate, designate common categories of thinking, and refer to standard practices and conventions in a social setting. Thus, the focus in these works is on socially shared linguistic repertoires of keywords and idioms with institutional change being cast as a variation on, or combination of, existing words and expressions from within that domain (Jones et al., 2012; Loewenstein et al., 2012; Weber et al., 2008). Schneiberg and Clemens (2006) critique this strategy by emphasizing that actors may be working from different cognitive principles and schemes than what they communicate in public and may also not “mean what they say” in the sense that discursive output does not flow directly from cognition” (Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006, p. 211). In other words, it is based on a rather strict, and to some extent naïve, assumption of discourse processes, one that considers discourse (or public texts) and cognition as isomorphic and thus merely casts discourse as a representation of the cognitive contents that are exchanged between communicating actors. Discourse, in other words, has a “re-presentational” role and is not assigned any formative, dynamic, or constitutive role of itself in shaping the social reality that actors inhabit.

**Performative Approaches to Institutional Discourse**

These criticisms to some extent present a fork in the road for research on discourse and institutions, in that they have led to different research streams, each of which clearly positions itself against the other. Research has first of all taken a more performative turn to discourse and institutions. This approach, which emerged in the early 2000s, can be
Discourse in Institutional Contexts

labeled as discourse-as-formative-of-institutions, and is also sometimes described as rhetorical institutionalism (Green & Li, 2011). It includes theory and research on framing (Kennedy & Fiss, 2009), tropes (Etzion & Ferraro, 2010), discourse (Phillips et al., 2004), and rhetoric (Green, 2004) within institutional settings and fields. A key assumption of this overall approach is that any collective cognition or joint understanding that forms the basis for institutions is not simply pre-existing and accessed or shared by individuals but is in effect constantly produced, or reproduced, in the use and exchange of discourse, as a central part of social interaction and communication (e.g., Phillips et al., 2004; Green, 2004). Discourse (including all kinds of symbolic expressions such as gestures and bodily signals) has a performative role in that its use pragmatically affects actors in their thoughts and behaviors, and thus has the ability to initiate broader cognitive change at the level of an institutional field. Studies of the role of rhetoric and discourse in the context of taken-for-granted institutionalized realities such as organizational forms, common routines and practices, and the establishment of market categories, for example, focus on the structure and characteristics of discourse used (including a focus on keywords, idioms, or rhetorical arguments) by actors, as ways of (re)producing institutions, and explore how linguistic choices or alterations to a linguistic repertoire may in turn initiate processes of institutional change (e.g., Green & Li, 2011; Maguire et al., 2004). In this tradition, Green et al. (2009) examine the changing rhetoric around total quality management, a business philosophy that they show gradually started to engulf US corporate organizations and became a taken-for-granted argument (enthymeme) that no serious manager could no longer do without. As in this instance, most institutional studies in the organizational domain are quite macro in focus in that the overall aim is to show, through the lens of discourse, changes in broader macro-level organizational or institutional fields.

The contribution of these performative approaches is that, compared to the representational model, they consider language not as a neutral, external window into cognition, but as performative and thus formative of the cognitive basis of institutions, as well as of any changes to such institutions. The assumption is that language use, akin to a physical force (Talmy, 2000), may produce or engender cognitive reactions. This pragmatic force of discourse involves its capacity to effectuate cognitive change, with the choice of certain words (such as slogans, metaphors, and idioms) and grammatical or stylistic features having a direct impact on individuals and collective groups within an institutional setting or field. In addition, performative approaches are often heavily theory-driven, in the sense that they already start with strong theoretical assumptions about this pragmatic force and about the effects of discourse, ranging from a rhetorical to Foucauldian tradition.

**Discourse as Constitutive of Institutions**

This approach is, compared to the performative approach, far less theory-driven, and to some extent collapses the distinction between discourse and (cognitive) institution as separately distinguishable entities (when discourse is cast as either a window into or force affecting institutions). Discourse is instead seen as the very process through which collective forms such as institutions are constructed in and through local interactions, rather than being merely a conduit for cognition or a means to effect collective thoughts (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). In this sense, discourse, in the form of continuous interactions at multiple levels and with multiple potential outcomes, is seen to directly constitute institutions. This view does not negate the performative character of discourse, but is theoretically more agnostic about the actual “force” and effects that discourse may
have in changing or maintaining the implied institutional status quo. It is also far less neat as a result, in that ambiguity and indeterminacy are expected and even assumed as an empirical commitment, as opposed to the more linear theory-driven accounts around hegemonic discourses, effective rhetoric, and institutional entrepreneurship typical of the performative approach. In fact, institutions, as common cognitive understandings, are an emergent effect, or outcome, that is tied into ongoing processes of discourse between diverse actors, rather than effectively casting institutions as separate entities at a different level of analysis and divorced from their “micro-foundations” in discourse and communication (see, e.g., Thornton et al., 2012).

The latter point challenges the common sociological tendency to oppose structure and action and macro and micro levels of analysis. The key suggestion here however is not to do away with such dualisms, but to recognize that institutions are first and foremost, as Fairhurst and Putnam (2004, p. 6) put it, “grounded in action” and thus “inhabited” (Hallett, 2010). Institutions, in other words, are constructed and negotiated on the terra firma of local, situated interactions in and through discourse (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). The resulting emergent outcomes – in terms of maintaining or changing an institution – may be confined to a specific set of interacting actors, but may also spread across a group of actors and organizations in an institutional field (Loewenstein et al., 2012). Importantly, such spread is itself contingent on discourse – consistent with the process of building up common ground and the abovementioned field of experimental semiotics.

This notion of discourse as institutions has not yet been fully explored in current research. There are some early papers that are starting to study and analyze institutions from this perspective (Ansari et al., 2013; Cornelissen et al., 2015; Loewenstein et al., 2012), but the overall perspective is still far from mainstream. A recent exception is the study by McPherson and Sauder (2013) on institutional logics in the context of negotiations in drug courts. McPherson and Sauder (2013) conceptualize logics as discourse-specific organizing principles, figures of speech, and arguments that are employed in interactions “on the ground” (as opposed to casting them as abstract macro-level belief systems) and that allow various actors to coordinate and manage their work and to reach consensus in an institutionally complex environment. In shifting to a discourse-as-institutions approach, they in turn argue that

in order to fully comprehend institutional maintenance and change, organizational scholars must pay careful attention to the ways in which institutions are negotiated, interpreted and enacted by individuals as they interact. Thus it is through dynamic local processes that institutional logics are attached to organizational activity in symbolic and substantive ways as actors constitute and shape their meaning and relevance.

(McPherson & Sauder, 2013, p. 168; emphasis added)

With this approach, discourse becomes constitutive of institutions, as it is primarily in and through the use of discourse in social interactions and communication that institutions exist and are performed and given shape. The metaphor of constitution suggests that in and through discourse use as part of social interaction, actors themselves construct a common base of understanding regulating their thoughts and behaviors. Such understanding may be contingent on prior interactions and may make use of available communal conventions, but may also be affected by the dynamics of the interaction itself (McPherson & Sauder, 2013).
Sensemaking and Institutions

In a parallel development in the field of organization studies, sensemaking emerged as a fundamental concept within organizational research in the late 1970s on the back of a growing interest among scholars in various streams of research that challenged notions of an objective reality in organizational behavior (Weick et al., 2005). As Maitlis and Christianson (2014) recently show, the historical roots of the sensemaking concept are quite diverse, emerging as it were from a confluence of streams of research that were salient at the time. These streams of research included fundamental work on ethnomethodology (see Figure 3.1), cognitive dissonance and speech functions, as well as organizational research on resource dependencies of organizations and studies of managerial attributions for success and failure. The very concept of sensemaking describes how in and through discourse individuals and groups in organizations pragmatically produce intelligible accounts of their environment, which are the “feedstock for institutionalization” (Weick, 1995, p. 35). Despite this link with institutions, sensemaking research has sometimes been criticized for neglecting the role of contexts in explaining cognition (Weber & Glynn, 2006), which is why sensemaking is positioned between the discourse-as-social-action and the discourse-and-institutions traditions in Figure 3.1.

The already mentioned study by Quinn and Worline (2008) of the hijacking of United Airlines Flight 93 on September 11th, 2001 illustrates the central role of discourse as part of sensemaking. People aboard the plane experienced a “shocking and incomprehensible” event that “tend[ed] to strip people of identity, leaving them no sensible narrative to enact” (Quinn & Worline, 2008, p. 501). Prior personal narratives or standard hijacking frames simply broke down in these circumstances. Individuals instead were forced to construct, whilst speaking to each other, a sensible narrative that reestablished an identity for themselves and allowed them to deliberate a novel action pattern of counterattacking the hijackers (Quinn & Worline, 2008). Importantly, this narrative of a counterattack in the context of the hijacking as a suicide mission had no institutional parallel (that is, in traditional hijacking scenarios, passengers and the crew remain seated or try to regain control of the airplane). One key insight of this study is that a novel form of sense, counterattacking the hijackers, had to be constructed from scratch.

In essence, the questions that a sensemaking researcher asks is how people in various organizational and institutional settings make sense of their circumstances in terms of their identity, activities, and relationship to others. Their sensemaking may be habitual and even largely unconscious for most routine activities, which then simply reaffirms the institutional scripts that they use. However, when individuals are faced with changing or unprecedented circumstances such as a crisis (as in Quinn & Worline, 2008) they have to make sense anew, and the sensemaking researcher in those settings looks at various data sources (real-time communication, transcripts, etc.) to reconstruct how individuals variably managed to do this and with what outcomes.

Discourse and Institutional Logics

Another recent analytic framework that links discourse to processes of institutional maintenance and change comes from theory on the micro-foundations of institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012). Thornton and Ocasio (2008) define an institutional logic as the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, through which actors provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce their lives and experiences. As such,
institutional logics, once established, also “prime” the activation of salient and culturally available knowledge structures, or schemas, in a social context (Thornton et al., 2012, pp. 83–84) and which then guide perceptions, actions, and decision-making in habitual ways. Thornton et al. (2012) ground their more recent model on the emergence and transformation of institutional logics in what they describe as a dynamic constructivist notion of culture, which suggests that whilst actors are situated, embedded, and constrained by institutional logics in their actions, they do have a reflective capacity as well as the ability to associate a particular setting with different logics. Consistent with Sewell (1992), actors can call or act into existence a change to an existing logic, supplant it with another logic or even blend or combine logics such as, for example, combining provincial Indian and modern art (Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010), micro-credit and finance (Battilana & Dorado, 2010), or environmental auditing and financial reporting (Etzion & Ferraro, 2010).

The key question however is how such singular discursive or symbolic acts of individual actors translate into more broad-based cultural change in the form of establishing or revising macro-level institutional logics and the cognitive schemas and practices associated with them. The key mediating processes here, Thornton et al. (2012) suggest, are what they label as the “symbolic representations,” or discourse that actors use to articulate institutional logics.

In their model, Thornton et al. (2012) distinguish three forms of discourse that actors use to express an institutional logic: theories, frames, and narratives. They define theories as abstract cause-effect explanations and rationalizations that provide general templates for action. Frames are the symbolic analogue, in Thornton et al. (2012), of cognitive schemas, consistent with Goffman (1974). And finally narratives are discursive accounts that arrange events and activities in a time-based storyline. It is at this level that actors can in and through symbolic expressions imply or directly present a revision or replacement of an institutional logic, and which then through further interaction and communication may spread across an institutional field and may lead to “common ground” among various individuals and groups (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 159) – again, in a very similar way to the grounding process discussed above in the communication and cognition tradition. A key contribution of the Thornton et al. (2012) framework is its focus on tracing how symbolic representations such as frames or narratives evolve, through further interaction and communication, into common category labels and conventionalized knowledge schemas.

**Discourse and Institutional Frames**

Diehl and McFarland (2010) developed an analytical framework for frame analysis within a social and institutional context by directly drawing on Goffman (1974). They follow Goffman in conceptualizing experience and actions in social situations as grounded in multilayered cognitive frames, which Goffman defined as “principles of organization which govern the subjective meanings we assign to social events” (1974, p. 11). In any given social situation, multiple frames may apply and are hierarchically layered and laminated on one another. Diehl and McFarland (2010) also consider frames, similar to Sewell (1992), as dualistic. This dualistic notion is a key tenet of Goffman’s (1974) work. “The difference, then, is between frames operating as the background structure of shared reality on the one hand and as tools for strategic and creative behavior on the other” (Diehl & McFarland, 2010, p. 1719).

Diehl and McFarland (2010) extend this dualistic nature of frames and place it in the context of a broader analytical framework that distinguishes between different layers of
frames and that can be used to analyze social situations. They first of all distinguish a “natural frame,” which involves researchers understanding events before these are scripted and understood in social terms. From this perspective situations involve actors and their embodied experiences but without any intentional or socially prescribed forms of actions. The second layer involves the “person frame,” defined as the “base layer of social interpretation” (p. 1721). Situations are analyzed in terms of understanding conscious and morally responsible actors, but without any further social roles being imposed on them, which is the next layer. The “institutionalized role frame” refers to the culturally legitimate frame for a given strip of activity, which is rooted in the conventions and rules for a given interaction order and thus prescribes certain social roles to actors such as that of a doctor interacting with a patient. The final layer is the “character” frame, which recognizes that “social situations are incomplete and require individuals to negotiate how to proceed in ill-defined spaces, to smooth over interactional rough patches, and to reinforce the underlying order by transforming it in various ways” (Diehl & McFarland, 2010, p. 1721). A doctor may when consulting a patient find it hard to deliver bad news and may adopt a different character (of, say, a sympathetic listener or parent) than the one that may have been institutionally prescribed (Tannen, 1985).

Of particular interest are the links between these different frames, especially between the institutionalized role and character frames. Goffman (1974) saw the seeds for cultural and social change in this linkage but also recognized that the institutionalized frame prefigures and constrains any deviating gestures and behaviors. For example, he argued that given that the institutionalized role frame anchors behavior in a given situated activity it also dictates who can extend or alter roles and in what manner. Diehl and McFarland (2010) capture this prefiguring role of the institutionalized role frame with the idea that the character frame, as an alternative framing in context, is a “lamination” on the straight role frame, meaning something that researchers can detect, although the lamination itself may not always be consciously experienced by the individuals that are being studied. As such, they also suggest that conceptualizing and in turn coordinating experience through the character frame is “Janus-faced” (Diehl & McFarland, 2010, p. 1725). On the one hand it “serves to reinforce the underlying institutionalized role frame upon which it is laminated” (p. 1725). They refer to instances where role performances require improvisation in action in the service of reinforcing or repairing a shared orientation toward the institutionalized role frame. On the other hand, the character frame “allows for actors to project out-of-frame roles and identities” (p. 1725). Roles may provide latitude in terms of behaviors, and thus allow for creative displays that reconfigure rewrite the script for a role altogether. Thus, for Diehl and McFarland (2010), the seeds of institutional change can be found in those moments and occasions when social situations involve clear shifts in “frame formulas” that link role and character frames, and that establish and in turn conventionalize a new interaction order between actors.

Encounters Between Traditions

In this section, we describe examples of concrete topics where pioneering interdisciplinary encounters between these traditions are occurring, blending complex phenomena like embodiment, sensemaking, and storytelling. The examples illustrate how research concepts, methods, and phenomena from fine-grained analytical traditions can be used to address and materialize institutional-theoretical phenomena that have typically been studied at a higher level of abstraction.
Embodiment, Sensemaking, and Institutions

One potential area of cross-fertilization is the recent work on embodiment and ongoing sensemaking in institutionalized settings. Sensemaking challenges the traditional assumption that discourse simply triggers or prompts the retrieval of frames and frame-based meaning and expectations from memory, and proposes instead that words and expressions in context may construct the very nature of such frames and expectations as an interaction unfolds (e.g., Quinn & Worline, 2008). Furthermore, one of the main insights that emerges from recent sensemaking studies is that more generally the bodily actions of individuals, including speech, do not simply express previously formed mental concepts or broader cognitive frames (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010). Instead, bodily practices, including the use of language, bodily gesturing and social interaction, are part and parcel of the very activity in which concepts and conceptualizations are formed (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011). Recent studies have for example highlighted how designers form conceptualizations through physically grasping, holding, or manipulating material objects such as prototype designs and drawings (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011). Such conceptualizations are then in effect constructed, rather than accessed, in the interaction with material objects and based on the sensations and ideas that such interactions afford (Whiteman & Cooper, 2011).

When such embodied acts are furthermore taking place in a social context, the physical manipulation of objects may be exploited to cue meaning to others and in essence provides a “scaffolding” around which new meanings are collectively constructed. Stigliani and Ravasi (2012), for example, demonstrate how designers shared visuals and artifacts that grounded common imagery for new products, and that allowed them to collectively elaborate and build up new emergent ideas. In this process, individuals, whilst communicating and interacting with one another, do not need to share or even have access to the same knowledge (Whiteman & Cooper, 2011). Instead, in such ongoing processes of communication, individuals generally exploit the built-up “common ground” between them, say in the form of a redrawn visual diagram (Bechky, 2011), as a resource for constructing collective understanding and for deriving pragmatic inferences (Clark, 1996). This emerging line of sensemaking research is still consistent with the notion of sensemaking as frame-based meaning construction, but draws heavily on ideas of embodied cognition and experimental semiotics. We believe that these connections are worth elaborating further, as these would give a much more rounded, multimodal view of how instances of sensemaking on the ground may maintain or change institutions.

Bodily Gestures and Institutionalizing Communication

Another fruitful area where various research traditions can be combined is investigating “institutionalizing communication”: communication that is used by actors to intentionally institutionalize a new entity, like a venture or organization, product, practice, or basic idea. One arena for potential study in which such forms of communication are central is entrepreneurship, as entrepreneurs who are developing new businesses typically have to gain institutional legitimacy for their burgeoning ventures in order to gain broad-based support and access final and social resources. In the absence of prior indicators of success or a clear track record, entrepreneurs must rely on their abilities and skills to communicate and persuade investors of the legitimacy and feasibility of their entrepreneurial venture to gain early stage investment (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010). Most work focusing on communication and persuasion in entrepreneurial contexts has taken a traditional view of communication which assumes
that understanding language requires “breaking down the physical information (e.g. speech sounds) into a language-independent medium” that constitutes a disembodied “language of thought” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 158). This approach is increasingly being challenged by recent work that demonstrates the importance of bodily communication and cues of an entrepreneur alongside speech as essential toward convincing investors of the legitimacy of a venture. Chen et al. (2009), for example, find that the display of an entrepreneur’s passion through frequent gesturing and animated facial expressions in business plan presentations or pitches influenced assessments of legitimacy as well as investment decisions. Because entrepreneurs have to sell their venture plans to potential investors, displays of passion are critical to convince targeted individuals to invest, because they indicate that the entrepreneur will be highly motivated to build a venture and pursue goals even when confronted with difficulties.

Gesturing in particular may be an important ingredient of institutionalizing communication. In field and lab experiments, Cornelissen et al. (2015) find that both the frequency and type of gesturing help to institutionalize a novel understanding of a venture or influence the decision to invest. Specifically, symbolic or metaphorical gestures helped frame a novel venture, and led it to be understood by investors seen as taken for granted by them, considerably more so than other more pragmatic and speech-structuring gestures (so-called beats, cohesive and deictic gestures). This effect, however, was only evident when such gestures aligned with metaphors or figurative language in speech (McNeill, 1992), and together produced a singular image that familiarized and in turn institutionalized the new venture. Whilst these findings are tied to the setting of entrepreneurship, we believe that they are nonetheless suggestive for other areas as well (see for example Mondada, 2013, on the embodied nature of turn-taking in town hall meetings as a factor of the construction of participatory democracy).

**Framing and Institutional Change**

A further set of linkages involves the relationship between an individual’s framing in context and interactively established group or collective action frames. In Frame Analysis, Goffman’s (1974) primary focus is on the experience of interaction and the shared frames that are constructed and agreed upon, and that make such constructions inter-subjectively meaningful and understandable (1974, p. 127). Tannen (1985) refers to these as “interactive frames.” In her study of pediatric examinations and consultations, she shows how such frames are not only constructed in interaction, but also reflect principles of interaction that are associated with the social identities of the participants and the institutional setting. A pediatrician in this study talks fluently to her peers about the medical condition of a child, but struggles in her language (with frequent hesitations and circumlocutions) when she decides to bridge between “examination,” “consultation,” and “mother” frames in an attempt to reassure the mother. Besides Tannen’s work, there has been little frame-based research that explores detailed social interactions of this kind, and how they lead to the establishment of joint interactive frames. A closer focus on social interactions – and, specifically, on the discursive alignment between interactants – provides a base for more fine-grained conceptualizations of frame-alignment processes and of the establishment of common ground (Loewenstein et al., 2012), or the settlement of joint meaning, as the basis for new practices, organizational forms, and markets. Yet, surprisingly, very little research exists on how common ground is established in and through repeated interactions, with most research focusing simply on the institutional consequences of its emergence (Barley, 1986; Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006).

Further research might therefore heedfully use the distinction between two basic kinds of common ground – personal and communal common ground (Clark, 1996) – which map
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onto the concepts of interactive and field frames. Personal common ground is built up by interacting actors in the course of communication or joint activity. When actors in an interaction need to make sense anew or need to bridge understanding, they have to build up personal common ground in a step-by-step manner, akin to interactive frames (Barley, 1986; Bechky, 2011). The conventions created as part of personal common ground during small-scale interactions (e.g., between pairs of actors, or between actors within small movements or groups) can in turn spread from one interaction to the next, leading to the emergence of cultural conventions in the form of field frames, or communal common ground, across actors in an institutional field (Garrod & Doherty, 1994; Fay et al., 2010). Here, then, is yet another example of the rich potential of cross-fertilization between the discourse-and-social-action tradition and the discourse-and-institutions tradition.

Organizational Storytelling

Storytelling has been repeatedly recognized as an important window into organizational processes like culture, politics, or change (Gabriel, 2000). However, research has often focused on the story itself as a decontextualized product (e.g., stories as abstract “types,” Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983) as opposed to the storytelling as a situated, collaborative performance. Pioneering studies of storytelling performance were conducted by Orr (1996) and Boje (1991). Orr’s (1996) classic ethnography of Xerox photocopy repair technicians revealed the central function of “war stories” in their everyday work activities. The technicians often had to face difficult working conditions in diagnosing and repairing the photocopy machines based on incomplete information and counterproductive rules and procedures. Extensive informal communication is an essential part of their sensemaking about these challenges, of which stories are an important part. Stories are told and retold, and can be re-used in particular to illuminate problematic situations. Storytelling also serves as a marker of community (often being elliptic in nature, and thus relatively opaque to outsiders), a demonstration of professional competence, and a celebration of the technicians’ self-views as “lone heroes.” Boje (1991) documented stories told in everyday conversations between managers, customers, and workers of an office supply firm. He analyzed both the details of storytelling performance, including their embeddedness in other forms of discourse and their often fragmented nature, and the sensemaking purposes they were used for. Aspects of performance were sometimes linked to strategic purposes (for example, tersely told stories used to obfuscate particular audiences), illustrating the potential link between storytelling performance and the accomplishment of informal organizational activities.

More recent work on storytelling performance has integrated the multimodal, embodied turn (Gylfe et al., 2016) apparent in later developments in the discourse-and-social-action tradition (see Figure 3.1). Sharma and Grant (2011) built on a dramaturgical approach to charismatic leadership to show how charismatic leaders use both discursive and material elements of stage management to perform visionary stories. Bangerter, Mayor, and Pekarek Doehler (2011) studied multimodal reenactments produced during storytelling episodes in nursing shift handover meetings. They showed how the performance of reenactments enabled shared sensemaking about non-routine events (e.g., complaining about difficult patients) or depictions of the narrator as a rational actor (e.g., in justifying a deviation from medical protocol). Küpers, Mantere, and Statler (2013) showed how organizational strategy can constitute an embodied experience by analyzing narrative practices in a workshop during which organizational actors redefined the strategy of the corporation. Storytelling
can also affect how individuals gain entry to organizations, with storytelling skills of job candidates playing an increasingly important role in hiring (Bangerter, Corvalan, and Cavin, 2014; Ralston, Kirkwood, & Burant, 2003).

This body of work is strikingly eclectic. There is a mix of researchers from the discourse-and-social-action tradition and the discourse-and-institutions tradition, with both groups interested in understanding the multimodal, embodied performance of stories and how they are used in institutional settings. Despite this shared interest, there is a wide range of research strategies and methods in use, and little cross-fertilization. For example, experimental research on storytelling has the potential to tease apart the effects of different factors like dialogue or media (Bavelas, Gerwing, & Healing, 2014) or audience participation (Kuhlen & Brennan, 2010) on storytelling performance, but this work has been little cited in institutional storytelling research, despite the potential relevance of such factors for institutional processes. Future studies should therefore investigate how detailed storytelling processes may affect institutional phenomena. One potentially promising strand of future research would be to document what kind of social actions are performed through storytelling and how these actions relate to the institutional situation (formative, constitutive, and so on). Another would be how particular features of the telling activity contribute to constitute a situation as an institutional one (Mandelbaum, 2012) or how the activity contributes to enact institutional roles or logics.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have tried to characterize the deep and reciprocal links between discourse processes and institutional functioning. Because research relevant to this question is spread out over many disciplines, subfields and schools of thought, we have started by describing three grand traditions of research on discourse and their main contributions to understanding discourse processes in institutions. The discourse-production-and-comprehension tradition is dedicated to understanding the cognitive processes in the production and comprehension of discourse, and has led to important advances in situation models, embodied cognition, and computational approaches for the automatic measurement and analysis of discourse. The discourse-and-social-action tradition has investigated the cognitive and social processes involved in coordinating conversations and the use of discourse in society, improving our understanding of how shared knowledge enables social interaction and how social interaction leads to the establishment of precedents and conventions. The discourse-and-institutions tradition approaches these phenomena from the opposite angle, looking at how discourse is constitutive of institutions, for example how discourse processes contribute to creating institutional realities or, on the contrary, to destabilizing them. It should be clear by now that these traditions have much to learn from each other, and we have tried to draw out some concrete examples of work on the ground that is already under way. We also hope to have shown how much potential there is for cross-fertilization.

In conclusion, we would like to revisit the issue of social change touched upon in the introduction. Social change is an excellent case for illustrating the link between discourse and institutions, because it is through discursive processes that seemingly rock-solid institutions or institutional arrangements can become vulnerable to change. Social change puts in perspective both the power that institutions normally have over collective thought and behavior, as well as the sometimes surprisingly sudden nature of their demise. A recent example is the role of social media in the “Arab Spring” popular uprisings that spread over several
countries of the Middle East in 2011. Social media enabled the rapid diffusion of discursive content to create shared values and commitment that proved essential to the coordination of social movements instrumental in the uprisings (Howard & Parks, 2012). In an analysis of over a million tweets produced during protests in Egypt in 2011 that led to the resignation of president Hosni Mubarak, Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012) used both computerized and qualitative discourse analysis to document a hybridization of traditional and emerging news values. For example, the instantaneous character of tweets conflicts with the traditional news value of fact-checking. On the other hand, phenomena like “crowdsourcing of elites” enabled the rise to prominence of previously unknown activists. This collaboratively constructed stream of “affective news” may have played a role in generating a sense of community among various publics and possibly furthering the uprising.

This kind of case poses a number of challenges. Reducing large-scale and fast-paced technology-mediated phenomena to an interpretable set of phenomena requires the prowess of computational analyses. But an adequate construal of the data also requires insightful analyses of the linkage between discourse and power, and ultimately, the nature of institutional functioning. More generally, the emerging potential for using automated analyses of large sets of existing discourse data (e.g., on social media) will require more dialogue between data scientists and discourse researchers, whether in the case of sudden social change or in related cases like the measurement of social trends (Schober, Pasek, Guggenheim, Lampe, & Conrad, 2016). In other words, understanding important real-world phenomena like in the current example will require harnessing different theoretical and methodological perspectives from each of the three grand traditions we have reviewed in this chapter (Schober et al., 2016).

Thus, whilst such a case is empirically challenging for any team of researchers, it also demonstrates the real value of an interdisciplinary, phenomenon-based approach to discourse and institutions. In the conclusion of their introduction to the first edition of this handbook, Graesser et al. (2003) proposed some future directions research on discourse processes should take to thrive. One of these was indeed a shift from “multidisciplinary” to “interdisciplinary” research. True interdisciplinary research involves joint collaboration on research projects by researchers from two or more disciplines. Those researchers are forced to coordinate their perspectives to solve the concrete problems posed by the project, which typically leads to a deeper understanding of the phenomena studied. Whilst pockets of truly interdisciplinary research have since emerged in the study of discourse processes, we believe that much potential remains with respect to the study of discourse processes in institutions, and we hope this chapter may help some individuals to engage in such joint projects.

Suggested Reading


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References


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