Introduction

What is discourse analysis?

The word ‘discourse’ has different meanings for different people. As Sara Mills (2004: 1) points out, the word ‘is used widely in analysing literary and non-literary texts and it is often employed to signal a certain theoretical sophistication in ways which are vague and sometimes obfuscatory’. In many disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, the term signals a broad set of ideas about the way in which texts and interactions construct social realities and power structures – ideas that are usually traced back to Foucault (1972). For linguists, discourse is usually more closely associated with concrete linguistic features of texts and interactions, but linguists do not always agree about what aspects of texts and interactions count as ‘discourse’.

Within linguistics, it is usually said that the term ‘discourse’ can refer to three different aspects of language: (a) the level of language above the sentence; (b) the way in which we actually use language to get things done in the world; and (c) the role that language has in constituting and reinforcing ideologies and relationships of power within societies, closer to the meaning given to the term by Foucault and his followers (see Jones, 2012c; Schiffrin, 1994).

Different ‘schools’ of discourse analysis tend to focus more on one or another of these three aspects of discourse: text analysts, systemic functional linguists (see, for example, Halliday & Hasan, 1976), and discourse analysts working in the tradition of the ‘Birmingham school’ (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) tend to be more interested in the first aspect – that is, the internal organisation (cohesion and coherence) of texts and interactions. The second aspect, ‘language in use’, is more associated with approaches such as pragmatics, conversation analysis, and interactional sociolinguistics (see, for example, Brown & Yule, 1983; Gumperz, 1982; Mey, 2001; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). And the third aspect, the social and ideological dimensions of language, is more associated with critical discourse analysis (see, for example, Fairclough, 1992), as well as feminist approaches to discourse (see, for example, Mills, 1995). But the truth is that all discourse analysts, to one degree or another, focus on all three of these aspects of language. In fact, one could argue that the aim of discourse analysis is to elucidate the relationship among the three: to reveal how the concrete features of situated texts affect the kinds of actions and interactions that can be performed with them, and ultimately the kinds
of relationships, identities, and societies that can be created. Put simply, discourse analysis is about understanding how we create our social worlds through texts. As Carter and Simpson (1989: 14) put it, discourse analysis ‘should . . . be concerned not simply with the micro-contexts of the effects of words across sentences or conversational turns but also with the macro-contexts of larger social patterns’.

It follows, then, that a discourse analytical approach to creativity focuses not only on the formal aspects of ‘creative language’, but also on the way in which language is used in situated social contexts to create new kinds of social identities and social practices, and to challenge existing social structures and relationships of power (Jones, 2012a). This focus distinguishes a discourse analytical approach to creativity from many of the other linguistic approaches to creativity represented in this book – approaches that focus on lexical or grammatical creativity (see, for example, Munat, Chapter 5), on figures of speech such as metaphors and puns (see, for example, Hidalgo-Downing, Chapter 6; Bell, Chapter 7), and also on underlying systemic or cognitive mechanisms that result in the generation of creative linguistic forms (see, for example, Langlotz, Chapter 2). A discourse analytical approach is less concerned with creative language per se and more concerned with the way in which linguistic resources are used to engage in creative actions – actions that somehow reconfigure or reshape social relationships. There may be nothing intrinsically ‘creative’ about an utterance or a text that comes under the scrutiny of such an approach – namely, there may be no ‘language play’, no metaphors, or puns, or other rhetorical devices normally associated with creative language, and it may not even be intrinsically original or inventive. In fact, it is sometimes through saying the most prosaic or formulaic things, or not saying anything at all, that people are most ‘creative’ in their use of language. Discourse analysts are interested in how people deploy linguistic resources in particular contexts in ways that allow them to mean more than they say, how they strategically appropriate and mix different styles and genres in order to communicate ‘what they are doing’ and ‘who they are being’, and how they operate within the constraints that their societies impose on what is ‘sayable’ and ‘doable’, and sometimes manage to challenge and alter those constraints.

‘Discourse’, then, is not simply language; rather, it refers to the complex ways in which people use language and other semiotic systems to take actions, assume identities, maintain relationships, and advance or contest ideologies. As Widdowson (2004: 169) argues, language is only ‘the overt linguistic trace of a discourse process [which is] available for analysis’. ‘Discourse’ on the other hand, is a ‘pragmatic process . . . whereby the resources of the language code are used to engage with the context of beliefs, values, assumptions that constitute the user’s social and individual reality’ (Widdowson, 2004: 14).

Discourse analytical approaches to language and creativity have been applied to a wide range of linguistic behaviour, including literary texts, business and professional communication, political discourse, and everyday conversation. There is often, in discussions of creativity, a distinction between approaches that concentrate on what has been called ‘“big C” Creativity’ – the kind of creativity that is found in great works of literature and ‘world-changing’ scientific discoveries – and ‘“small c” creativity – the creativity of everyday life that allows us to solve the many vexing problems that our environments, other people, or our own minds constantly present to us. Boden (2003) refers to these two ‘types’ of creativity as ‘h creativity’ (historical) and ‘p creativity’ (personal). Although a discourse analytical approach to creativity is not prepared to erase the distinction between the kind of creativity involved in writing a great sonnet or symphony and that involved in making a clever quip at a cocktail party or getting your boss to give you a raise, it is particularly
interested in understanding how and when these two types of creativity interact, how the consequences of ‘‘big C’ Creativity’ can affect how people communicate and ‘get by’ in everyday life, and how people’s creative responses to the moment-by-moment challenges of everyday life can result in broader ‘historical’ changes to the social order.

**Critical issues and topics**

While there are many issues of concern to discourse analysts interested in creativity, the main issues that distinguish a discourse analytical approach from other linguistic approaches to creativity are a preoccupation with: (a) context – the situatedness of language; (b) dialogue and intertextuality – the way in which the language always exists within a web of discourse; and (c) social action – the way in which people use language to do things and to participate in the larger social practices that constitute various ways of ‘being in the world’ (Wittgenstein, 1973).

**Context**

It is often said that discourse analysts are interested in the study of ‘language in context’. This is one of the things that sets it apart from approaches such as that of Chomsky (1965), which view language primarily as a system. When Chomsky speaks of ‘linguistic creativity’, he is mainly referring to the ability of the linguistic system to generate an infinite number of unique utterances, regardless of the circumstances in which actual people might actually employ such utterances. For discourse analysts, whether or not an utterance should be considered ‘creative’ has less to do with the ‘uniqueness’ of the utterance and more to do with the way in which the utterance interacts with the context in which it appears. Language use is always situated within some time, some place, and some set of social relationships, and it always takes at least part of its meaning from the way in which it ‘fits in’ with these various contextual factors. What this means is that a large part of linguistic creativity is not only ‘saying the right thing’, but also ‘saying the right thing at the right time to the right person’, responding inventively and appropriately to ‘the potentials and limitations of different social contexts’ (Tusting & Papen, 2008: 6).

It is important to note that, in this discussion, I’m mostly using the word ‘utterance’ rather than ‘sentence’ or ‘text’. This distinction comes from Bakhtin (1984), who distinguishes between sentences – abstract chunks of language that serve as the units of analysis in structuralist linguistics – and utterances – specific, unrepeatable acts of speaking tied to specific people and specific situations. It is in the ways in which language is tied to these people and situations – in the very unrepeatability of utterances – that discourse analysts locate linguistic creativity. Strictly speaking, ‘there is no . . . way of being creative’, argues Widdowson (2008: 503), ‘by focusing on the message form.’ Creativity is a function of how the message form interacts with the context in which it appears.

Although ‘context’ can be said to be a preoccupation of all discourse analysts, different schools of discourse analysis differ regarding the scope and scale of context that ought to be considered. For conversation analysts, for example, context is strictly limited to the local sequence of turns in talk, as well as those aspects of the social situation towards which speakers explicitly orient themselves. Context is created moment by moment, as each speaker’s contribution is both afforded and constrained by the utterance that has come

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before and creates both opportunities and constraints for the utterances that can follow. Conversation analysis is the approach to discourse probably least associated with creativity (although, as I will discuss below, it has been used extensively in the study of dialogue in literary texts). A closer examination of this understanding of context, however, sheds considerable light on the micro-level creative processes that accompany every turn at talk, on the incremental, moment-by-moment ways in which we create our social realities, and on the way in which creativity is always a matter of working within constraints.

At the other extreme are approaches to discourse influenced by anthropology, such as Hymes’ (1974) ‘ethnography of speaking’, which take a much wider view of context, exploring how utterances are enabled and constrained by the speech events, speech situations, and broader sets of cultural conventions in which they occur. For those taking this approach, the creative potential of context does not stop at the borders of individual conversations, but extends out into the rich fabric of culture, all of the resources that it provides, and the myriad occasions that it affords for people to come together and interact. Many scholars working in this tradition have examined the contexts of verbal performance, such as the occasions for the sharing of myths and stories (see, for example, Darnell, 1989; Hanks, 1996; Hymes, 1981), focusing not only on the conventions that govern such occasions, but also on the opportunities that they afford for creative modification and adaptation of traditional forms, and on the creative potential of recontextualisation – the way in which performances are transformed when they are transferred from one context to another (Bauman & Briggs, 1990; see also Maybin, Chapter 1). The most important thing about this approach to discourse is that it views all speakers as, in some sense, performers who constantly exercise their creativity in the ways in which they ‘adapt speech to the situation and the situation to speech’ (Duranti, 2009: 21).

Another approach that takes a wide view of context is critical discourse analysis, but the concern here is more with the ideological nature of context – the ways in which context and the opportunities for creativity it affords reflect the power relations within societies. Rather than conversations or cultures, context is seen in terms of ‘orders of discourse’ (Foucault, 1972) or, to use Gee’s (2011) term, ‘capital D’ Discourses – the ways of thinking, talking, acting, and knowing that societies make available in different domains and for different social actors. Just as, for conversation analysts, creativity is a matter of working within the constraints of conversational structures, so, for critical discourse analysts, creativity is a matter of working within societal structures, adapting to and sometimes contesting dominant ideologies, and finding the fault lines and the cracks in the edifices of power. As Fairclough (1992: 91) puts it: ‘[S]ubjects are ideologically positioned, but they are also capable of acting creatively to make their own connections between the diverse practices and ideologies to which they are exposed, and to restructure positioning practices and structures.’

In between these extremes – context as the micro-organisation of conversations, and context as the macro-organisation of cultures and societies – are approaches such as pragmatics and interactional sociolinguistics, which in many ways provide some of the most interesting ways of looking at the relationship between context and linguistic creativity. Such approaches emphasise the fact that language is not only situated, but also situating – that people have access to all sorts of ways of using language to create situations and to dynamically negotiate aspects of context as they go along, shifting and changing contexts, and even ‘laminating’ one context upon another. In pragmatics, while context is seen as disambiguating the meaning of language, language can also be seen to disambiguate (or sometimes ‘ambiguate’) context, allowing speakers to hint at, or strategically distance themselves from, the various definitions of the situation available around a particular speech act. Interactional
sociolinguists, drawing on the work of Goffman (1974), call the process by which people create situations when they talk ‘framing’. While physical contexts (such as classrooms and hospitals), and cultural and social contexts, with their conventions and power structures, are often fairly rigid, imposing all sorts of constraints on what we can say and do, interactional frames are more flexible, allowing us to ‘cue’ (Gumperz, 1982) and ‘key’ (Goffman, 1974) different versions of what is going on, and to position ourselves in various ways within these different contexts (Sawyer, 2001; see also Sawyer, Chapter 4).

More recent approaches to discourse, such as mediated discourse analysis (Norris & Jones, 2005; Scollon, 2001), take the flexible and multifaceted dimensions of context even further, exploring how every situation actually entails multiple contexts occurring both on multiple timescales and in the histories of texts and other cultural tools that circulate through moments of social interaction. In other words, social interactions occur at the nexus of multiple overlapping and interested contexts spread across time and space. From this perspective, not only are utterances always unique and unrepeatable, but so too are contexts, and every new configuration of contexts, with its unique mixture of people, tools, and texts, brings with it unique affordances for creative action.

Dialogue

To say that language is always dialogic is, in the simplest sense, to assert that all utterances are not only situated, but also somehow connected to previous utterances: that all utterances are always parts of ‘conversations’. As Macdonnell (1986: 1) puts it: ‘dialogue is the primary condition of discourse; all speech and writing is social’. While this point may seem obvious, it has far-reaching implications for the study of linguistic creativity. It points towards not only the fact that every utterance is in some way enabled and constrained by the utterance preceding it (as discussed above), but also the facts that all utterances are connected to other utterances in a complex web of discourse and that they respond not only to utterances in their immediate proximity, but also to utterances, conversations, and people that may be far removed from the time and place of speaking or writing. While the focus of creativity in the above discussion on context was on the way in which speakers and writers manage the relationship between text and context, here it is on the way in which speakers and writers manage the relationship between texts and other texts.

This more expansive understanding of dialogue also has its roots in the work of Bakhtin – especially in his early work on the novels of Dostoevsky (Bakhtin, 1984). For Bakhtin, the real source of linguistic creativity is not the fact that language allows us to say new things in new ways, but the fact that we must always do so in collaboration with others. All utterances are ‘co-created’ – the ‘joint property of speaker and listener’ (Morson, 2009: 14). Bakhtin (1986: 167) called this property of language ‘addressivity’ (obrashchennost’), and insisted that it is this feature, not the generative power of rules, that makes language (and, by extension, thought and action) capable of genuine ‘unexpectedness . . . “surprisingness,” absolute innovation, miracle, and so forth’.

What this means, first of all, is that language in use is always, to some degree, unpredictable and contingent – a quality that is aptly captured by Erickson (1986: 316) when he likens having a conversation to ‘climbing a tree that climbs back’. One of the key aspects of creativity in language use is that, despite the constraints we impose on one another’s conversational contributions and despite the wealth of conversational routines in most languages, we can never be sure how others will respond to what we say and, in fact, there is a sense in which less predictable responses are more highly valued. Leech (1983: 146) suggests
that underlying all communication is what he calls the ‘interest principle’: the principle ‘by which conversation which is interesting, in the sense of having unpredictability or news value, is preferred to conversation which is boring and predictable’.

Another thing that it means is that every utterance in some way anticipates a certain kind of audience – that, through our utterances, we create not only conversations, but also social relationships and social identities. Bakhtin (1984) gives a number of examples from the novels of Dostoevsky in which utterances are styled and shaped for specific hearers, but it is also not hard to find ample evidence of this in our everyday conversations. Not only do we shape our utterances to particular audiences, but we also shape audiences with our utterances. While many aspects of social identity are fairly fixed, most are co-constructed to some degree as we interact: we actively position others in various ‘storylines’ (Davies & Harré, 1990), and negotiate power and social distance (Brown & Levinson, 1987), when we speak with them.

Perhaps the most important aspect of dialogism is that it helps us to see not only how speakers and listeners in particular conversations are connected to each other, but also how conversations are connected to other conversations. When we speak, says Bakhtin, we do not address only our immediate interlocutors, but we also, to varying degrees, address ‘third parties’ comprising those who have already spoken on the topic at hand in previous conversations. Whenever we speak, we always take a stand in relation to texts and utterances from the past.

More than that: we inevitably construct our utterances by appropriating and mixing these voices from the past. All utterances are not only dialogic (responding to other utterances), but also heteroglossic, containing the traces of other people’s words and the contexts in, and purposes for which those words were used. In a sense, then, all texts and conversations involve ‘remixing’ (Knobel & Lankshear, Chapter 25). We do not only remix words; we also appropriate styles (what Bakhtin calls ‘social languages’) and genres associated with different social practices and institutions, and, when we do so, we invoke and position ourselves in relation not only to specific conversations in the past, but also to larger societal debates – what Gee (2011) calls ‘“capital C” Conversations’.

From this perspective, linguistic creativity is less about saying something ‘new’ and more about being able to appropriate and assemble the voices of others, to mix them in strategic ways, and to adapt them to particular circumstances and particular goals. Creativity is a matter of ‘populat(ing)’ the words of others with our own ‘intentions’ – of speaking the words of others with our own ‘accents’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 293).

Discourse analysts representing a range of different approaches have extensively explored the phenomena of dialogism and heteroglossia, usually under the labels of ‘inter-textuality’ and ‘interdiscursivity’. Interactional sociolinguists, for example, have analysed the ways in which people appropriate and enact the voices of others, especially in oral storytelling. Mediated discourse analysts have examined how people strategically appropriate voices as a way of claiming and imputing social identities and membership in communities (Scollon, 1998). Linguistic anthropologists have shown how people appropriate and mix the conventions of different genres to fit new cultural situations (Briggs & Bauman, 1992). And critical discourse analysts have documented how text producers and text consumers adopt and adapt elements from multiple ‘“big D” Discourses’ to reproduce or challenge ideologies (Fairclough, 1992).

When seen through the wider lens of ‘“capital C” Conversations’, the political and ethical dimensions of such acts of linguistic creativity become clear. The ways in which we use language in conversations to strategically position ourselves in relation to our immediate
interlocutors has consequences for broader social debates and struggles. Every time we engage in "small c" conversations, we are also contributing to the broader "capital C" Conversations of our societies. In other words, every conversation represents an opportunity either to reproduce existing social orders or to contribute to social change. This underlying ethical dimension of dialogue is also present in Bakhtin's original formulation: it is through the addressivity of language in use that people become truly 'present' and 'responsible' for each other. In dialogue, as Bakhtin (1993: 40) puts it, there is 'no alibi'.

**Action**

As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, what distinguishes a discourse analytical approach to language and creativity is its focus not so much on creative language, but on the creative actions that we use language to take, how we, as Austin (1976) famously put it, 'do things with words'. Austin's theory has at its heart a view of language as creative action – a view that sees creativity not only in language’s ability to 'call attention to itself' (the chief function that Jackobson assigned to 'poetic' language), but in its ability to actually shape and transform reality. When we speak, we not only make meanings; we also take actions.

The power of words to alter the physical and social world is most dramatically captured in Austin’s notion of ‘performatives’: utterances such as ‘you’re under arrest’ or ‘I now pronounce you husband and wife’, which, just by being uttered, fundamentally alter the social situations in which they are uttered. Austin’s most important contribution, however, was his realisation that all utterances have a performative dimension – that they always ‘do’ something.

The creative potential of this performative dimension of language is perhaps most apparent in what Searle (1969) refers to as ‘indirect speech acts’: utterances that allow us to do things without even saying that we are doing them. This ability changes our scope for creative action, allowing us to strategically modulate our relationship to our actions. Indirect speech acts allow us to ‘laminate’ different communicative goals onto a single utterance, to create ‘plausible deniability’ for our actions, and to hint at actions we do not wish to take directly as a way in which to ‘test the waters’ when we are uncertain how the other person will react. The fact that so much of what we do with words is governed by processes of implicature and inference opens up considerable space for creativity (see, for example, Sawyer, 2001).

This reorientation from a focus on linguistic forms to a focus on language as a tool for action is, of course, also central to most other theories of discourse analysis, including: conversation analysis, in which conversations are seen as a matter of ‘joint action’ (Clark, 1996); interactional sociolinguistics, which explores the negotiative processes by which people strategise their actions in conversations; mediated discourse analysis, which sees utterances and texts as ‘meditational means’ for the accomplishment of concrete social actions; and critical discourse analysis, which is centrally concerned with the role of discourse in political action. All of these approaches support a perspective that locates creativity not in language itself, but in the actions that we are able to take with language.

A focus on action is inseparable from the issues of context and dialogue discussed earlier. Whenever we act, we always act in and on some context (and, in so doing, potentially alter that context), and we always act with others (and, in so doing, potentially alter ourselves and those other people). The scope of our action is both enabled and constrained by contexts and dialogues. Creativity comes into play when we are able to use language and other semiotic means to open up space in situated conversations for actions and identities that were not previously possible.
Also, as with context and dialogue, a focus on action helps us to make a connection between the ‘small c’ acts of creativity in which people engage in everyday conversation, and the broader domains of society and culture. For when we ‘do things with words’, we are not only doing actions; we are also participating in recognisable social practices and enacting recognisable social identities. This is the rather broader sense of performativity invoked by Judith Butler (1990) in her argument that seemingly stable social categories such as gender are essentially performative. In this sense of the word, the performative nature of language can be understood as the way in which it allows us to be ‘certain kinds of people’ and engage in ‘certain kinds of activities’ through an ongoing series of cultural performances.

Despite the power of social conventions to constrain cultural performances, just as performativity in Austin’s more limited sense of the word holds within it the potential for creative action, so does Butler’s more expansive usage. In an essay entitled ‘Performativity’s social magic’, Butler (1999) argues that performativity has the potential to create opportunities for dominant notions of context and identity to be expropriated and transformed by less powerful social actors. What kinds of new possibilities for social actions and social identities are opened up, she asks, ‘when those who have been denied the social power to claim “freedom” or “democracy” appropriate those terms from the dominant discourse and rework or resignify them (Butler, 1999: 123)? What, she asks, ‘is the performative power of appropriating the very terms by which one has been abused . . . ?’ (Butler, 1999: 123).

What Butler is talking about here is the fact that, as much as ‘“big D” Discourses’ constrain social actions, especially for those whose experiences they marginalise, they are also vulnerable to being compromised, undermined, and transformed. These transformations occur not only through great works of art, the speeches and policies of powerful politicians, and paradigm-changing scientific discoveries, but also through the incremental everyday actions of individuals as they ‘do things with words’, ‘combin(ing) discursive conventions, codes and elements in new ways (that) cumulatively produce structural changes in the orders of discourse’ (Fairclough, 1992: 97). As Jones (2010: 473) writes:

> When discourse is used creatively, it can potentially change ‘orders of discourse’ on two levels: first on the level of the immediate interaction by shifting the relationships of power among participants, creativity reframing the activity that is taking place, or otherwise creating possibilities for social action that did not exist at the outset of the interaction, and second, on the level of society or culture, by contesting conventional ways of seeing things and opening up possibilities for the imagining of new kinds of social identities and new kinds of social practices.

**Current contributions and research**

**Discourse analysis and literature**

While my discussion thus far has been oriented towards a view of creativity that brings us beyond what is normally considered ‘creative’ or ‘literary’ language, there are many good examples of the application of tools from discourse analysis to the analysis of literary texts. In fact, it might be argued that, since the 1980s, the field of stylistics has been undergoing a ‘discursive turn’, increasingly exploiting tools from conversation analysis, politeness theory, speech act theory, Gricean pragmatics, and critical discourse analysis to explore the dimensions of context, dialogue, and action in literature (Carter & Simpson, 1989; Green, 2009).
The problem with much early work in stylistics – especially that influenced by the Russian formalists – is that it regarded literary works as creative objects in and of themselves, locating creativity in structural elements of texts (primarily phonological, lexical, and grammatical features). As Fowler (1984: 83) argues, the consequences of this perspective were to minimise the ‘communicative and interpersonal – in a word, pragmatic – functions of the text . . . which give the richest significance for critical studies’.

More recent studies that have explored what Fowler (1984) calls the ‘pragmatic functions of the text’ can be divided into three kinds: those that focus on issues of context, dialogue, and action within the fictional worlds of texts; those that focus more on the interaction between texts and readers; and those that take a more Foucaultian view of discourse, exploring the social and ideological dimensions of literary texts.

Notable studies in the first category include Magnusson’s (1999) use of politeness theory and conversation analysis to analyse the dialogue between characters in Shakespeare’s plays, and Person’s (1999) application of ideas from interactional sociolinguistics to examine the way in which conversational structures are represented in literary dialogue. Other good examples of this approach are the applications of speech act theory to the understanding of dramatic dialogue by scholars such as Nash (2008) and Short (2008).

Studies in the second category usually come closer to focusing on the concerns that I have been outlining as central to a discourse analytical approach to creativity. Perhaps the most notable among these is Black’s (2005) formulation of what she calls ‘pragmatic stylistics’. Using a range of theories from pragmatics, including politeness theory, Gricean pragmatics, and relevance theory, Black explores how the contexts that authors create for their characters affect the ways in which we interpret characters’ actions, how authors strategically weave together multiple ‘voices’ and represent discourse in both direct and indirect ways, and the ways in which metaphor and symbolism work through the mechanisms of implicature and inference.

Also notable is the work of Jacob Mey (1999, 2001, 2009a), who also examines literary texts as active (specifically Gricean) collaborations between reader and author. In his book *When Voices Clash: A Study in Literary Pragmatics*, Mey (1999) addresses many of the key issues discussed above specifically as they relate to literary reading. The book is primarily about the ways in which authors appropriate and mix different ‘voices’, and the pragmatic effects (and challenges) that this entails. Negotiations among these different voices take place against the backdrop of what has been referred to as “‘capital C” Conversations’: the voices of the society that, like ‘invisible partner(s) in all our conversations’, are ‘mumbling behind our backs, while we seemingly are speaking like “free linguistic agents”, unobserved and unmonitored’ (Mey, 1999: 7).

Finally, there are those studies that focus on the status of the literary text within broader ‘orders of discourse’ and the role of literary creativity in helping to create social change. Of course, literary theorists and postmodern critics have long taken inspiration from the work of Foucault, but have mostly not addressed the specifically linguistic dimensions of ‘orders of discourse’. More linguistically oriented discourse analysts who have turned their attention to the social and ideological aspects of literature include Fowler (1981), who, drawing on the work of Halliday (1978), traces the ways in which an author’s choice of register reflects the social and economic relations in the society in which he or she writes. Other work of this type has been heavily influenced by Fairclough’s (1992) critical discourse analysis, such as Birch’s (1989) analysis of reading as a political practice and Mills’ (1995) feminist stylistics.
Discourse analysis and everyday creativity

As discussed above, a central concern of a discourse analytical approach to creativity is the examination of how people use language in their everyday lives to engage in creative actions – especially actions that contribute in some way to the transformation of social orders. I use the term ‘everyday creativity’ to distinguish this kind of work from discourse analytical approaches to literary works of art. I do not intend, however, to limit the term to ‘everyday casual conversation’, but also wish to include more specialised uses of language associated with business and professional discourse, medical discourse, and political discourse.

There are so many studies that touch on the creative aspects of language in use from the various schools of discourse analysis that an exhaustive account would be impossible. Instead, I will mention a few studies that I believe exemplify different perspectives on creativity in discourse studies.

First, no account of discourse analytical approaches to creativity would be complete without a mention of the considerable work on conversational narrative carried out using a range of discourse analytical tools. What sets this work apart from much of the work done on literary narrative (see MacRae, Chapter 15) and on the structure of narrative from a sociolinguistic perspective (see, for example, Labov & Waletzky, 1967) is its attention to the situated, collaborative, and occasioned nature of oral stories – in other words, to the relationship between the way in which people tell stories and the contexts in which they are told, the dialogues of which they are part, and the actions that they are used to take.

Among the concerns of discourse analysts working in narrative is the way in which people use them to construct and contest social identities, and to ‘align’ themselves with their listeners (see, for example, Bamberg, 1997; Schiffrin, 1997), the ways in which tellers and listeners work together to ‘co-author’ stories (see, for example, Goodwin, 1984; Schieffelin, 1986), and the ways in which stories are creativity embedded within larger interactive processes (see, for example, Goodwin, 1982; Ochs, Smith, & Taylor, 1989).

One notable example is Norrick’s (2000) work on narratives in conversation, in which he highlights the diffuse, co-constructed, and heteroglossic nature of everyday storytelling, as well as the pragmatic functions that narratives serve in ongoing conversational interactions.

Anthropologically inspired approaches to narrative have focused more on its performative aspects – that is, on the ways in which narratives construct cultural occasions and cultural identities based on shared understandings of how, when, where, and to whom different types of stories are most appropriately told, what sorts of people are entitled to tell them, and what sorts of people are entitled to hear them (Bauman, 1986; Shuman, 1986). One focus of this research has been on how stories are strategically contextualised and recontextualised into different situations (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, Maybin, Chapter 1). Another has been on how storytellers strategically appropriate and mix different narrative genres in order to challenge existing power structures. Briggs and Bauman (1992) refer to this phenomenon as ‘generic intertextuality’. They argue that, by appropriating and combining elements of canonical genres, people in less powerful positions in societies can find creative ways in which to claim ‘textual authority’ by linking their experiences with traditional narratives. This kind of creativity is illustrated, for example, in Jones’ (2015) analysis of the ways in which gay and lesbian people claim cultural legitimacy by mixing the canonical genres of the exemplum, the testimony, and the confession in stories of anti-gay bullying, and in Shuman’s (1993) account of the ways in which women strategically contest gender boundaries through the strategic mixing of genres traditionally reserved for men with those traditionally associated with women.
Yet another area in which discourse analysis has been able to shed light on creativity in everyday interactions has been in studies that examine how people strategically negotiate ‘what’s going on’ in interactions. As I mentioned earlier, the contexts in which we interact are not fixed; participants often have quite a lot of ‘wiggle room’ with which to frame and reframe situations and to strategically position themselves within them.

Most of the work on framing in interaction has been done within the paradigm of interactional sociolinguistics. Perhaps the most well-known study is that of Tannen and Wallat (1987), who analysed how a paediatrician uses various contextualisation cues, such as subtle shifts in tone and register, to dynamically manage the different activities involved in examining an 8-year-old child with cerebral palsy, framing the examination as a ‘game’ for the child, as a ‘consultation’ for the mother, and as a ‘lesson’ for medical residents, who will later watch it on videotape. In another article entitled ‘Talking the dog’, Tannen (2004) shows how family members often use the frame of ‘talking to the dog’ to actually talk to other family members when they feel uncomfortable saying things to them directly, and, using data from the same study on family communication, Gordon (2008) shows how parents strategically frame and reframe utterances as ‘parenting’ and ‘play’ in their interactions with their children. Such studies highlight the fact that a discourse analytical approach to creativity sometimes requires attention not only to the words that people say, but also to the sometimes subtle interactional cues that they use to signal, reinforce, or challenge the mutually constituted definition of the situation.

Another approach to discourse that focuses on the creative ways in which people manage identities and activities in interactions is positioning theory. Developed by psychologist Rom Harré and his colleagues (Davies & Harré, 1990), positioning theory explores the discursive processes through which people negotiate their own and others’ identities in interaction by portraying themselves as ‘characters’ in jointly produced ‘storylines’ – storylines that involve broader cultural values and ‘moral orders’. Because interaction typically involves multiple storylines, participants usually have available to them multiple positions that they can strategically adopt, contest, and play off against one another. This potential for strategic action is particularly relevant in interactions in which individuals with relatively less power attempt to resist, subvert, or adapt to a relatively powerless positioning in one storyline by adopting a more powerful one in another. Preece (2009), for example, has shown how so-called remedial students in universities strategically counter institutional positionings by adopting powerful positions within alternate storylines associated with peer groups, their families, or their communities.

Genre analysis (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990) is another approach to discourse that has made a contribution to understanding the ways in which people use language creativity, especially in academic, corporate, and professional communication (see Bhatia, Chapter 9). A key difference between most literary approaches to genre and discourse analytical approaches is that the latter focus less on genre as a matter of formal conventions and more on genre as a matter of social action (Miller, 1984). Genres are tools that enable users to accomplish private intentions within the frameworks of socially recognised purposes by bending and blending various expectations about the style and structure of texts held by the discourse communities to which they belong (Bhatia, 1993, 1997, 2012; see also Bhatia, Chapter 9). In fact, the ability to use genres inventively, rather than slavishly follow ‘templates’, is one of the best indicators of expert membership in a community.

I have already asserted that the key to understanding a discourse analytical approach to linguistic creativity lies in understanding not only how people can creatively alter linguistic forms, but also how they can use language to creatively change the world – and no other
approach to discourse captures this more activist approach to creativity better than critical discourse analysis. As much as critical discourse analysts are concerned with the ways in which ‘orders of discourse’ exert power over individuals, they are also interested in the creative ways in which people exercise ‘resistance’ – how, by producing new meanings, new practices, and new ways of organising their relationships through discourse, people can function as agents for social and cultural change (see, for example, Blommaert, 2005; Fairclough, 1992). Discursive means for resistance available to the less powerful include strategies such as creatively appropriating the voices and genres of the powerful, and using silence, euphemism, satire, irony, and what Halliday (1976) refers to as ‘anti-languages’ (Flowerdew, 2008). Examples can be seen in Jones’ (2007) study of the strategies that gay men in China use to claim cultural legitimacy, Canagarajah’s (1999) study of resistant discourse practices of students and teachers in Sri Lanka, and Lamb’s (2013) examination of the ways in which immigrant organisations have affected debates about immigration control in the United Kingdom.

Finally, mediated discourse analysis (Norris & Jones, 2005; Scollon, 2001) provides yet another perspective on discourse and creativity: one that focuses on how social actors creatively mix discourse with other cultural tools (both semiotic and technological) in performing social actions and negotiating social identities along historical cycles of discourse and action – that is, what Scollon (2008) calls ‘discourse itineraries’. Mediated discourse analysis shares with approaches to ‘distributed cognition’ (see Langlotz, Chapter 2) the view that creativity is less a matter of the individual, and more a matter of the individual acting together with other people and with various ‘cultural tools’. Creativity is, as Lave (1988: 18) puts it, ‘stretched across mind, body, activity and setting’. A good example of this approach is Jones’ (2012b) ethnographic study of urban skateboarders in Hong Kong, which documents how skateboarders make use of various discursive and physical tools (skateboards, fashion, and digital video cameras) to cognitively scaffold their learning and construct identities as members of unique ‘crews’. Another example is the study by Jones and his colleagues (2012) of writing in public relations firms, showing how seemingly ‘uncreative’ processes, such as the use of templates and ‘boilerplate’ text, actually facilitate creative collaboration and the socialisation of new employees into the creative practices of the firm.

The ethnographic approach to research advocated by mediated discourse analysis and many of the other approaches mentioned here highlights the importance of a discourse analytical approach to creativity to go beyond the analysis of isolated texts and to seek to understand the ways in which texts often cycle through multiple contexts in complex ‘itineraries’, involving complex webs of intertextuality and interdiscursivity.

Future directions

In the coming years, discourse analytical approaches to language and creativity will need to confront two interrelated phenomena: (a) the fact that an increasing amount of human communication is mediated through digital technologies (for an overview, see Jones & Hafner, 2012); and (b) the increasingly multimodal character of communication, which has led to what might be considered a ‘multimodal turn’ in contemporary approaches to discourse (see, for example, Jewitt, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

According to Mey (2009b: 12), ‘the use of the computer in creative contexts represents a true breakthrough in the relationship of humans to their work, especially as regards their ways of creative production and reproduction’. Digital technology has put into the hands of
ordinary people a range of discursive tools formerly available only to professionals, such as the ability to create sophisticated multimodal web pages and digital videos. It has also introduced new genres that challenge users’ creative capacities, such as tweets (Tagg, 2012) and the ‘small stories’ that individuals collaboratively compose on social networking sites (Page, 2010). Part of the creative potential of digital technologies also lies in the way in which they can facilitate creative intertextuality and ‘remixing’ (see Knobel & Lankshear, Chapter 25). In some circumstances, these technologies have introduced opportunities for users to transform power relations in their everyday lives and to increase possibilities for agentic action, from the ways in which young people use digital technologies to manage their social lives and escape the surveillance of parents and other authorities (boyd, 2014; Jones, 2008), to the ways in which digital video and social media have been used in the context of social activism and protest movements (see, for example, van de Donk et al., 2004). At the same time, some have argued that digital technologies can also limit people’s access to creative action by constraining the range of discursive choices that they can make by means of such things as dropdown menus, design templates, and default settings (van Leeuwen, 2012).

Related to the challenges introduced to discourse analysis by new technologies are those introduced by the increasing recognition that accounts of discursive behaviour that focus solely on linguistic means inevitably give an incomplete picture. All communication is, to some degree, multimodal and an important part of understanding how people use language creatively is understanding how they mix it with other modes. Kress (2003) argues that all communication is essentially a form of ‘design’, in which people strategically play off against each other the affordances and constraints of written and spoken language, images and video, gesture, music, and other modes. As meanings move across modes, and as modes interact with one another, texts and contexts are transformed, and new possibilities for human action and dialogue are created (Jaworski, Chapter 20; Kress, 2010).

Thus far, most of the work in multimodal discourse analysis has focused on the structure and meaning of multimodal texts, and much progress has been made in understanding the affordances and constraints of different modes and the ways in which these modes interact. In the future, however, more attention will need to be paid to the ways in which multimodal and multimedia texts are ‘emplaced’ (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) in physical and social contexts, how they get recontextualised as they travel through networks and across platforms, the kinds of “capital C” conversations’ that they support and constrain, and the new kinds of social practices and social identities that they make possible.

Related topics
creativity and dialogue; creativity and interdiscursive performance in professional communication; creativity and technology; discourses of creativity; everyday language creativity; language, creativity, and remix culture; literary narrative; literary stylistics and creativity

Further reading

This edited collection presents many good examples of discourse analytical approaches to literary creativity.


Jones, R. H. (ed.) (2012) *Discourse and Creativity*, Harlow: Pearson Education. This edited collection includes examples of discourse analytical approaches to creativity in many different domains, including literature, professional communication, art and music, and digital communication.


References


