INTRODUCTION

The title ‘discourse theory’ implies a unified body of concepts that together make up this theory. Nothing could be further from this state of affairs (and perhaps rightly so). A more representative term would be ‘discourse theories,’ paying heed to the multiplicity of theoretical antecedents to the field (Heracleous, 2006; Phillips & Oswick, 2012). The concept of organizational discourse refers to collections of texts patterned by deeper structures or common features that cut across particular texts (Heracleous & Hendry, 2000). Language is the raw material of texts, collections of which make up discourses (Heracleous, 2006).

Despite the multiplicity of antecedents, and bearing in mind some exceptions (such as Wittgenstein’s early views about correspondence theories of language expressed in the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and some branches of linguistics), most discourse theories inspired by the philosophy of language and social theory are interpretivist and social constructionist in nature; with the attendant ambitions to be processual and context sensitive.

In this chapter, these ambitions are exemplified by discussion of semiotics, conversation analysis, speech act theory, critical discourse analysis, the structurationist perspective, and rhetorical analysis. In each case, I outline the analytical foci of the approach, point to relevant sources and empirical studies, and discuss the processual orientations attendant to each approach. I selected these discursive approaches because each one of them, at its inception and subsequent impact, represented fundamental developments in social theory or philosophy; and has informed or in some cases shaped aspects of the organizational discourse field.

By the term process in this chapter, I adopt van de Ven’s (1992: 169) third view of process as ‘a sequence of events that describes how things change over time.’ Van de Ven’s (1992) other two definitions refer to process
as a causal relationship between input and output variables in a variance theory, or certain concepts operationalized as variables and measured on numerical scales. Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst’s (2006) review of strategy process research focuses on studies adopting the latter definitions. Variance- and construct-related definitions of process would likely not be accepted as processual by most organizational discourse theorists, and particularly by advocates of processualism in strategy and organization theory (e.g., Langley, 2007; Pettigrew, 1997; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

A process perspective operates at different levels simultaneously. Micro-process in narrowly defined settings (such as conversation analytic studies, e.g., Samra-Fredericks, 2003), meso-level processes such as organizational change (Ford & Ford, 1995), or societal level change and its links with language change (e.g., Fairclough, 1992). Studies can be carried out longitudinally as comparative cases, for example, in real time combined with historical exploration, or purely historically. Pettigrew (1997) notes that guiding assumptions of processual studies include the embeddedness of actions in context, over time and at multiple levels of analysis; holistic rather than linear explanations; and an effort to link processes and outcomes. Several empirical studies of organizational discourse discussed in this chapter would conform with these criteria.

We can discern at least two interrelated types of process considerations in relation to discourse theory; first, what we can call ontological process considerations, that is, viewing discourse as an embedded, ongoing, constitutive processual element in the construction of social reality. This is apparent, for example, in Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory, in Saussure’s (1983) structural linguistics, and in the various antecedents of critical discourse analysis (e.g., Fairclough, 1992, 2005). Secondly, and flowing from the above, what we can call epistemological process considerations. This refers to how we analytically and methodologically make sense of the role of discourse in relation to its social effects, for example, Fairclough’s tripartite framework of the mutually constitutive interrelations among texts, discourses, and social practices (Fairclough, 1992, 2005), where the parts should be understood as mutually constitutive over time. Studies tracking arguments-in-use over time, and discerning links between changes in arguments, and institutionalization processes or particular organizational changes (e.g., Green, Li & Nohria, 2009; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001) also exemplify this epistemological orientation.

Organizational discourse studies draw from social constructionist ontologies, which hold that what may appear as reified, stable social reality is, in fact, the result of ongoing processes of social construction, patterned by discourses and other ongoing and recursive social practices (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). The social construction process is characterized by social interaction, strategic employment of language and texts, and power dynamics within broader organizational and institutional contexts (Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, 2004). The processes involved are complex and engage the modalities of interpretive schemes, norms, as well as resources or facilities, as Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory outlines. Organizational discourse studies assume that social and organizational reality is a work in progress that can best be understood in a process of becoming rather than as a given.

Views of organizations as discursive have accompanied the attention to process. Fairhurst and Putnam (2005) discern three ways in which the interrelationship between discourse and organization has been seen: organizations as already formed objects with discursive elements, organizations in a state of becoming with discourse as constitutive, and organizations as grounded in discursive action. The latter two views are inherently processual in terms of both ontology and methodology.

In what follows, I explore various discourse theories, their analytical foci, and their processual orientations. I begin with semiotics as a foundational perspective that can reveal
key assumptions about the processual embeddedness of meaning that apply to all the other approaches discussed in this chapter.

SIGNS, SYMBOLS, AND THE EMBEDDEDNESS OF MEANING

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1983) viewed language as a system of signs where there is an arbitrary link between the signifier (the word) and the signified (the meaning). Rather than a single meaning being linked to a single word, the meaning arises from the differences between interconnecting signifiers. With shifting differences come different meanings. At a foundational level, Bateson's (1987) analysis of play shows that particular moves and sounds in simulated, playful combat between animals are interpreted as play rather than as real combat because meta-communicative messages signaling ‘this is play’ provide a frame within which other signs are interpreted. Therefore, different frames (the presence of which is itself communicated by signs) lead to different interpretations of the same sign or set of signs. If the frame shifts, the associated meanings shift.

Further, even within the same frame, the linguistic context of a particular utterance shapes its meaning. For example, if during a conversation one of the conversants, A, says, ‘it’s getting hot in here,’ it could be interpreted as a literal statement of the temperature of the room; as a statement that conversant B is taking the discussion to areas that are perceived as contentious, emotional, or interrogative; a warning to bring back the discussion to more agreeable terms; or a warning that conversant A is about to leave. In terms of speech act theory, the locutionary statement ‘it’s getting hot in here’ uttered by conversant A has a certain intention (illocutionary force) that may produce differential effects for conversant B (perlocutionary force) depending on how conversant B interprets the statement.

Conversant B’s interpretation (the meaning arising from the utterance) is in turn dependent on the linguistic, situational, organizational, and even broader contexts; on the topic of conversation; and on such issues as racial, gender, occupational, or national identities as relevant to the situation.

Therefore, Saussure conceived of a fundamental process, relational orientation in terms of how meanings emerge and may change over time. At the level of method, Saussure distinguished between synchronic and diachronic linguistics, or studies of language at a certain point in time versus studies of language change over time, with an explicit processual concern. Further, while over time signs can remain the same, the meanings associated with them (their symbolic, connotative elements) may shift.

For example, the swastika, currently widely derided and reviled as a Nazi symbol, has its roots in antiquity as an auspicious symbol found in a number of cultures around the world: As Heller (2008) writes:

Today, simply uttering the word ‘swastika’ evokes revulsion, indeed terror, in many. Yet by all accounts, throughout most of its long history, the swastika, the Zelig of all symbols, was comparatively benign. Prior to its transfiguration, it served as religious phylactery, occult talisman, scientific symbol, guild emblem, meteorological implement, commercial trademark, architectural ornament, printing logo, and military insignia (p. 4) ... Its roots dig deep into prehistory and emerge in antiquity. In 1874, Dr. Heinrich Schliemann discovered swastika decorations during his archaeological excavations of Homer’s Troy. He later traced similar iterations to among other realms, Mycenae, Babylonia, Tibet, Greece, Ashanti on the Gold Coast of Africa, Gaza, Lapland, Paraguay, and Asia Minor. It was discovered painted or etched into Etruscan pottery, Cyprian vases, and Corinthian coins (pp. 6-7).

From a synchronic perspective, at a certain point in time the swastika appears to agents to have a particular meaning, that is, to possess an apparently stable link between the signifier and the signified. From a diachronic, process perspective, however, the signifier/signified link is ever-changing and contingent, even
with contradictory meanings across its different iterations over time, depending on context and the strategic employment of this sign by particular agents pursuing particular goals.

Signs can also incrementally change diachronically, with stability in the type of intended meaning (combined with incremental change in the precise meaning). For example, the mearkaoalli system of earmarks in the reindeer herding culture of the Saami in Lapland has been employed for centuries as a way to identify ownership of reindeer. Reindeers are crucial for survival in Lapland and other locations with similar climate. Without denying their nature as live creatures, they are also ‘facilities,’ to use Giddens’ (1984) language, resources, the control of which is linked to the power of individuals, families, and tribes. There are major ear cuts, denoting particular families and lines of inheritance, combined with more minor cuts denoting ownership by particular individuals. As individuals marry and herds combine, the cuts change accordingly (Pennanen, 2006). Even though the pattern of cuts is different, the class of meaning is the same; it denotes ownership, and is linked to the identity of both the family and the community the overall pattern is related to. Figure 12.1 below shows a traditional community record of these marks and the individuals and families associated with them.

In this example, we can see each earmark pattern as a text, with the individual large and small marks as signifiers that make up the text. Each signifier is meaningless without reference to the surrounding ones, and the text itself is meaningless without reference to the inter-subjective beliefs of the community. Without these beliefs, these patterns would just be random cuts on reindeer ears rather than symbols of ownership and identity. This example shows that meaning is socially attributed, rather than inherent to the signifiers. Further, these signifiers are parts of a broader discourse that revolves around the survival needs and functioning of the Sami community. The local language has evolved accordingly. Reindeer herders employ additional features to identify individual reindeer, such as ‘gender, age, body shape, hair colour, shape of antlers, lack of antlers and character’ (Nakkalajarvi, 2009: 140). The Kanunokeino dialect of North Saami has over a thousand terms to describe reindeer (Eira, 1984: 59).

A semiotic perspective (among others) shows that meaning is contextually contingent.

**Figure 12.1 Record of meomerkalli reindeer earmarks in the Sami culture**

*Source: Siida Sami Museum, Inari, Lapland. Photo by I. Heracleous.*
rather than universally and longitudinally linked to particular signifiers. Further, and in particular from a process perspective, contexts (semantic, situational, organizational, social) shift over time, and so do the meanings accruing to particular signifiers. With respect to linguistic labels, the denotative meaning can acquire several different connotations. By denotative meaning, we refer to the conventional dictionary meaning of a term, what Bateson (1987: 184) calls a sign. By connotative meaning, we refer to the associated meanings that arise depending on context, conventions, and interpretation, when a sign becomes a signal. As Bateson (1987: 183–184) notes, “human verbal communication can operate and always does operate at many contrasting levels of abstraction. These range in two directions from the seemingly denotative level (“The cat is on the mat”). One range or set of these more abstract levels includes those explicit or implicit messages where the subject of discourse is the language. We will call these metalinguistic ... The other set of levels of abstraction we will call metacommunicative ... In these, the subject of discourse is the relationship between the speakers ... the vast majority of both metalinguistic and metacommunicative messages remain implicit.”

The swastika is an apt example of the process of how connotative meaning (the signal) may change over time, whereas the denotation (the sign) is the same. The swastika has meant different things (has become a symbol of something else) at various historical periods. Its current meaning is so emotionally charged that even displaying or re-creating this symbol in public can provoke disorder and the intervention of the state apparatus (the news regularly reports arrests of individuals who have dared to display or create this symbol in public). It is clear that signs and symbols are not merely a matter of cognition, but often involve intense emotional associations, which are again not inherent in the signifier but are attributed by broader systems of meaning and the agents operating within these systems.

DISCOURSE THEORIES AND PROCESSUAL ORIENTATIONS

Below I discuss five discursive approaches: conversation analysis, speech act theory, critical discourse analysis, the structurational perspective, and rhetorical analysis. Table 12.1 outlines this discussion.

Conversation Analysis

Conversation analysis (CA) has its roots in ethnomethodology, viewing social life as an ongoing accomplishment rather as a taken-for-granted fixture. It is “a generic approach to the analysis of social interaction that was first developed in the study of ordinary conversation but which has since been applied to a wide spectrum of other forms of ‘talk-in-interaction’” (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990: 284). The focus of CA is conversational turn-taking and other observed features such as pauses and repair mechanisms; and seeks to discover empirically the implicit rules of interaction, treating conversation as a ‘speech exchange system’ (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974: 696).

Sacks et al. (1974: 699) maintained that such an analysis had ‘important twin features of being context free and capable of extreme context-sensitivity’; in other words, that the principles identified would hold in general terms in different contexts; but that they would also manifest in context-specific ways. In this sense, actions are both ‘context shaped’ as well as ‘context renewing,’ since their production and interpretation arise from particular frames, and they in turn become context for subsequent actions (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990: 289). This view of context is a very specific one, and while useful and appropriately circumscribed for the purposes of CA, would be seen as limited when compared with the broader contextual concerns of other approaches such as rhetoric or critical discourse analysis.

Empirical studies have brought CA more explicitly into organization studies and
Table 12.1 Discourse approaches, analytical focus, and processual orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical approaches</th>
<th>Analytical focus</th>
<th>Processual orientation</th>
<th>Indicative studies and sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conversation analysis</td>
<td>Focus on features such as turn-taking, intonation, pauses, and repair mechanisms, as systems of exchange and as reflecting situational and relational attributes</td>
<td>Fine-grained, micro-level orientation, e.g., particular conversations; short-term time frame</td>
<td>Goodwin &amp; Heritage (1990); Molotch &amp; Boden (1985); Sacks, Schegloff &amp; Jefferson (1974); Samra-Fredericks (2005); Tulin (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech act theory</td>
<td>Discourse as action; focus on how discourse is employed and interpreted in context and in particular situations, what are the operative meanings and outcomes</td>
<td>Episodic, meso-level orientation, e.g., organization change; medium-term time frame</td>
<td>Austin (1961, 1962); Ford &amp; Ford (1995); Guild (2002); Heracleous &amp; Marshak (2004); Searle (1975)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical discourse analysis</td>
<td>How discursive constructions present dominant power relations as natural, how they create particular identities and shape social practices in the interests of the powerful</td>
<td>Meso-level (e.g., organizational restructuring) or macro-level orientation (e.g., social change); medium-term or long-term time frame</td>
<td>van Dijk (1993); Fairclough (1992, 2005); Jacobs &amp; Heracleous (2001); Mantere &amp; Vaara (2008); Phillips, Sewell &amp; Jaynes (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structurational perspective</td>
<td>Links between communicative and structural levels over time; shifts in central themes and their constructions, and how these influence practice</td>
<td>Meso-level (e.g., communicative action analysis) or macro-level (structural analysis); medium-term to long-term time frame</td>
<td>Heracleous &amp; Barrett (2001); Heracleous &amp; Hendry (2000); Howard &amp; Geist (1995); Witmer (1997); Yates &amp; Orlikowski (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
<td>Central themes and their construction, identification, rhetorical strategies, organizational- and institutional-level outcomes</td>
<td>Can be applied to episodic, meso-level and macro-level; short-term to long-term time frames</td>
<td>Barrett, Heracleous &amp; Walsham (2013); Brown, Ainsworth &amp; Grant (2012); Green, Li &amp; Nohria (2009); Saddaby &amp; Greenwood (2005)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

sociology by showing, for example, how intentional control of conversations can have contextual relevance in terms of accomplishing particular agendas, such as Molotch & Boden’s (1985) studies of transcripts of the Watergate hearings. Others such as Tulin (1997) and Samra-Fredericks (2003) have endeavored to show how talk-in-interaction can empirically illustrate the links between micro processes (the talk) and macro processes (the actualization of structures), seeking to illustrate central claims of structuration theory (Tulin, 1997). Samra-Frederick’s (2003) research shows how strategizing is accomplished via strategists’ rhetorical and relational skills exhibited in routine conversation.

The processual orientation of CA operates at the micro-level of interaction, and more particularly interactional talk. Where video data is available, features such as gaze, gestures, and spatial positioning are taken into account (Tulin, 1997). Claims that CA can shed light on macro-level processes however, are as yet debatable.

Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory was developed by Austin (1961, 1962) and elaborated by Searle (1969). It draws on earlier insights by Wittgenstein (1986 [1953]), in particular the notion of ‘language games.’ Wittgenstein (1986 [1953]) noted that his earlier correspondence view of language advanced in his book *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (that words have particular, invariant meanings that have a one-to-one correspondence to particular things they refer to) included ‘grave mistakes’ (1986: viii). He argued in *Philosophical Investigations* that words acquire their meanings in use, in the context of language games that interweave
language and actions; these language games are interrelated in terms of ‘family resemblances’: ‘I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes use of the same word for all, – but that they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all “language” … I can think of no better way to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”’ (1986: 31–32, emphasis in original).

Austin (1961) took issue with the prevalent approach of the philosophy of language that was concerned with utterances or statements and their truth or falsity in describing a situation. He argued that language has other uses, one of which is to accomplish things rather than just to describe. These utterances may look like statements, and truth or falsity may be relevant, but is not their main intent: ‘… if a person makes an utterance of this sort we should say that he is doing something rather than merely saying something. … Now these kinds of utterance are the ones that we call performative utterances’ (Austin, 1961: 222). Performative utterances, rather than potentially being true or untrue, are primarily felicitous or infelicitous depending on whether there are relevant conventions that support the performative act and whether the act is invoked in appropriate circumstances. Austin (1962) distinguished between locutionary acts, the act of saying something; illocutionary acts, the intent or force of the utterance; and perlocutionary acts, what we achieve by the utterance (1962: 108); and elaborated on five types of performatives (1962: 150). Searle (1969) elaborated further on the notion of the speech act in a more systematic way, and related the notion of speech acts to prevalent debates in the philosophy of language. He proposed that language is structured by constitutive rules, as an activity that is logically dependent or constituted by these rules.

Speech act theory has been employed in organization theory to understand the functions and performative role of language in particular situations. For example, Ford and Ford (1995) inverted the conventional view that communication occurs in the context of change, to argue that change is constituted by different types of intentional, performative communicative acts. These can accomplish among other things, initiation of a change process, understanding of what needs to be accomplished, evaluation of performance, and closure.

Guild (2002) analyzed the illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts of management and employees as a participant observer during a layoff at a ski resort, which indicated the relative importance of different stakeholders to management. She argued that speech act analyses can inform an understanding of legitimation processes pertaining to particular discourses.

Heracleous and Marshak (2004) employed speech act theory among other approaches to develop a conception of discourse as situated symbolic action. They employed this conception to analyze the trajectory of discursive acts within a management meeting, which moved from a position of contest between advocates and opponents of a proposed organization design, to a transition point, to collaboration, to subsequent renewal of confrontation. Speech act theory in particular lent an applied orientation focusing on the intent and the outcomes of communicative acts, that is, the illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions.

In focusing on the performative power of utterances as well as their perlocutionary dimension, speech act theory is contextual and amenable for employment during processes of organizational change (Ford & Ford, 1995), to research particular organizational events in depth (Guild, 2002), or particular debates that have strategic import (Heracleous & Marshak, 2004). In all these studies, processual considerations are embedded by virtue of the need to study the flow of events over time.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) gains inspiration from social theorists such as
Foucault, Gramsci, and Althusser to view discourses not merely as representations of objects or events, but as social practices and ideologies that have real effects in terms of power inequalities and domination. A well-known formulation that has influenced CDA in organization theory is Fairclough’s (1992) tripartite analytical framework of texts, discourses, and social practices. As he notes: ‘discourse analysis has a doubly relational character: it is concerned with relations between discourse and other social elements, and relations between texts as discursual elements and “orders of discourse” as discoursal elements of networks of social practices’ (2005: 924, emphasis in original).

CDA is not content with mere analysis, but is interventionist (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000), seeking to expose the ways in which discourses perpetuate inequalities and unfair practices and to advocate for social change. Change can take place through the ‘transformative potential of social agency’ that can in time lead to reworked discourses and different social practices (Fairclough, 2005: 925).

Fairclough (2005: 926) views texts as processual, in terms of how texts are textured, made, and remade as instances of social action; involving processes of reification and nominalization, for example. Such processes can be studied at various time scales, from the historical time frame to current, ongoing textual processes and relations with social practices. Such studies often explore how discourses are associated with particular understandings and interpretive schemes, what van Dijk (1993: 980) refers to as the ‘socio-cognitive interface between discourse and dominance.’

CDA has enjoyed significant influence in organization theory (e.g., Balogun, Jarzabkowski & Vaara, 2011; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Phillips, Sewell & Jaynes, 2008). Jacobs and Heracleous (2001), for example, employed a Foucauldian archeological approach to analyze the conceptual foundations of German management accounting, or ‘Controlling science.’ The term ‘Controlling’ has been used in Germany since the 1950s to refer to management control based on cost accounting techniques; the aim is to ensure rationality in managing the organization. The authors note that whereas Controlling science presents itself as a rational, neutral accounting system, it also conforms with and embraces Panoptical principles, in particular hierarchical observation and normalizing sanction. In this way, it becomes a technology of power rather than a neutral representation of performance. Understanding the operations of Controlling science as a mode of discourse that produces its own truth effects and authority regime, necessitates a process-oriented perspective that can reveal the interactions between this system and how agents attempt to both function with it as well as subvert it in a Giddensian (1984) process of dialectic of control.

**Structurational Perspective**

Despite the fact that Giddens has not produced extended discussions of the concept of discourse per se, a hermeneutic view of language is embedded in his works and is integral to his theory of structuration (1984). Structuration theory (1984) includes communication as one of three strands of interaction; in particular, communicative interaction is linked with structures of signification through the modality of interpretive schemes. Giddens views discourses as modes of knowledge articulation, constitutive of social life, and operating through agents’ discursive and practical consciousness (Giddens, 1984: 83–92). Further, discourses are ideological, amenable to manipulation by dominant classes in pursuit of particular ends (1979: 190–193). The constitutive quality of language, as the raw material of communication and discourses, is based on its ubiquitous nature as a medium of social interaction (1984: xvi) and its ability to characterize and typify (1993: 54) what it refers to.

Structuration as a term connotes process and becoming (as opposed to the term
structure, which connotes stability and fixedness). Structuration theory draws attention to how social structures that appear immutable are far from that, depending on ongoing recursive interactions to maintain their stability. From a process perspective, it is worth noting that language is employed by Giddens as an illustration of the concept of duality of structure (that structures are both the medium and outcome of recursive interactions and practices). In particular, linguistic rules (structures) are enacted, reaffirmed, and sustained through recursive communicative actions, thereby exhibiting a duality between the rules themselves and their recursive usage in practice. A structurational view of discourse therefore incorporates a duality of communicative actions and deep structures, interacting through the modality of actors’ interpretive schemes (Heracleous & Hendry, 2000; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). Yates and Orlikowski (1992), for example, discuss how communication genres can emerge through the interaction of individual communicative actions and institutionalized practices.

Further, from a process perspective, structuration theory is sensitive to temporal considerations, recognizing the reversible time spans of duree (daily life) and longue duree (long-term, institutional time frame); and irreversible time, the finite human life span (1993: 28). The duality of structure and, more broadly, structuration processes are accomplished via ‘reversible time’ (Giddens, 1984: 35), enabling the recursivity and routinization of social practices. By ‘reversible time,’ a term he borrowed from Levi-Strauss, Giddens (1984) refers to time that repeats itself, in recurrent cycles within which routines are embedded and in turn constitute social systems. As he noted, ‘all social systems, no matter how grand or far-flung, both express and are expressed in the routines of daily social life’ (1984: 36).

Empirical studies of discourse employing structuration theory have overwhelmingly adopted the concept of duality of structure, together with associated understandings of the nature of structures as rules and resources instantiated through recursive practices; and the mutual constitution of the action and structure levels (Barrett, Heracleous & Walsham, 2013; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Heracleous, 2006; Witmer, 1997). Empirical research on organizational discourse, however, has yet to grapple with some of Giddens’s fundamental, process-oriented concepts. These include both the concept of reversible time, as well as the interwoven dimensions of temporality relating to daily practices, individual life spans, and historical, institutional time (Heracleous, 2013). Such discourse studies would need to track features of communicative actions and texts longitudinally and relate the patterns identified to institutional features. This could be done at various time frames, including at the macro level in the context of ‘episodic characterizations’ and ‘world time’ (1984: 244), the analysis of historical episodes as shaped by discourses and social practices.

**Rhetoric**

Rhetoric is the employment of discourse in context, to accomplish persuasion of the audience. Traditionally, ethos (character of the rhetor), pathos (use of emotion), and logos (use of logical argument) were seen as the main means of persuasion (Aristotle, 1991). Arguments could draw from various ‘commonplaces’ or ‘topics’ which reflected widely held opinions and concerns of the audience, and the rhetor would attempt to create identification or ‘consubstantiality’ between the direction of persuasion they aimed for and appropriate topics, as well as between themselves and their audience (Burke, 1969). Therefore, awareness of context, including audience and situation, were and are crucial for effective rhetoric (Bitzer, 1968). Such classical considerations continue to be central in analyses of rhetoric and have illuminated diverse areas such as processes of institutional change (Brown, Ainsworth & Grant, 2012), the legitimation of contentious decisions.
(Erkama & Vaara, 2010), and the exercise of charismatic leadership (Heracleous & Klaering, 2014).

Over time, the domains of application of rhetorical analysis have expanded. Barrett et al. (2013), for example, informed a rhetorical approach with the discursive levels of communicative action and deep structures suggested by structuration theory, and operationalized these two levels through the concepts of framing and ideology lenses, respectively, to analyze the process of diffusion of new technologies. Green, Li, and Nohria (2009) employed rhetorical analysis, focusing on the enthymeme (arguments-in-use) to show how processes of institutionalization are mirrored into argument structures, using a case study of the diffusion of total quality management. Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) employ rhetorical analysis, in particular the concept of rhetorical strategies, to show how proponents and opponents of a new organizational form employ such strategies, based on underlying notions of legitimacy, to support or oppose this form. The above are rhetorical studies of macro-level change, of the diffusion of new technologies (Barrett et al., 2013), of new organizational practices (Green et al., 2009), and of new organizational forms (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). In all cases, such change is seen as reflected in, as well as shaped by, the kinds of rhetorical arguments and rhetorical strategies employed by actors engaged with these changes.

Hybrid Approaches

The foregoing approaches are not necessarily distinct, and have been used in conjunction with each other in particular research programs. Yates and Orlikowski (1992), for example, employed rhetoric with structuration theory, Heracleous and Marshak (2004) employed speech act theory, rhetoric, and ethnography of communication within a social constructionist perspective, and Barrett, Heracleous, and Walsham (2013) employed rhetorical analysis informed by structuration theory as well as the framing and ideology perspectives.

Further, particular theoretical perspectives on the role of discourse and its relation to organization have been developed, drawing from the above and other domains. One example is the Montreal School, within the CCO, or ‘communication as constitutive of organization’ movement (Kuhn & Putnam, 2014). The Montreal School draws primarily from speech act theory and actor network theory (e.g., Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Taylor & Cooren, 1997), and focuses on co-orientation of agents, involving both the micro-discourse of conversation through interaction, as well as the creation of more enduring texts. In this view, the dialectical relationship between conversations and texts is what constitutes organization. According to Kuhn and Putnam (2014: 425), ‘the text-conversation dialectic evinces a grammatical structure that provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for organizing – in other words, the seeds of organization are found in language, its text-conversation relationship, and its coordinated activity.’

Where to for Discourse Theory in Relation to Process Studies?

I would suggest that the most pressing need, in terms of employing discourse theory in process studies, is not in the development of the antecedents or substance of discourse theory. These benefit from long lines of development and constitute rich traditions that can be consulted to instill sophisticated discursive concepts in empirical research. Rather, what is needed is an explicit effort to link particular aspects of discourse theory, as relevant to the theme being researched, with processual frameworks that can shed light on that theme. For example, Parousis and Heracleous (2013) employed discourse theory to understand what are the main themes that strategists employ when they refer to strategy, and whether these themes
manifest to different degrees in different stages of institutional adoption, signifying particular types of institutional work carried out by these strategists. Underlying the theoretical grounding of that work was the Figure 12.2 (accompanied by a theoretical narrative), which relates a specific aspect of discourse theory (first-order strategy discourse) to managerial cognition, managerial practice, and institutional outcomes.

Secondly, theoretical experimentation would allow us to extend key discursive perspectives to a broader variety of empirical settings. By theoretical experimentation, I mean adopting a given perspective beyond domains, levels, or time frames within which it has been conventionally adopted. For example, whereas speech act theory was developed in relation to analysis of particular speech acts during conversational interaction in particular situations, Ford and Ford (1995) employed this perspective to shed light on classes of performative acts that enable organizational change, over longer time frames; and Guild (2002) to shed light on processes of legitimation and to offer insights to the perspectives that different groups of agents adopt, in the context of organizational layoffs.

By the same token, we can employ particular discursive ideas outside their conventional habitus to shed light on processual issues or theoretical areas where a process perspective would be fruitful. This would have to be accomplished while remaining faithful to the spirit of these discursive ideas, and in the context of robust conceptual and empirical operationalizations of these ideas. Effectively extending discursive studies in this manner would also entail open-minded gatekeepers in terms of publishing this work. These would be gatekeepers able to see the substance of the work being done, and judge it on its internal coherence, validity, and insight, rather than making recommendations based on unproductive dogma or particular agendas of established perspectives.

Third, discourse theory has to try and shed its image of being incomprehensible and conceptually inconsistent; both of which occur more often than we would like to admit, and in the process may dissuade young, promising scholars from pursuing discourse-related research. As discourse theorists, we should try to write in logical, clear, accessible, understandable terms, rather than complicating things as a matter of course, believing that this is somehow an indicator of excellent scholarship.
I am not holding my breath on this last one. Institutional fashions, demands, and long-term habits are difficult to break out of. But it is still worth mentioning.

I have argued in this chapter that discourse theories are inherently processual, in both ontological and epistemological terms. Combined with views of organizations as discursively constituted (or at least as discursively shaped; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2005) and in a state of continual becoming (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), organizational discourse approaches are naturally suited to fulfill the call for more empirical, processual studies that regard actions as contextually and temporally embedded and privilege dynamic over cross-sectional explanations (Langley, 2007; Pettigrew, 1997).

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