

*Heracleous, L. 2006. Discourse, Interpretation, Organization.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.*

1 *Images of Discourse: Interpretive, Functional, Critical, and Structural*¹

THE linguistic turn of the later twentieth century has led to a widespread and growing interest in discourse, both in organization studies and in the social sciences more generally. Since the late 1970s, organization scholars have begun to move beyond a conception of language as a functional, instrumental conduit of information, and drew attention to its symbolic and metaphorical aspects as constructive of social and organizational reality (Dandridge, Mitroff and Joyce, 1980; Manning, 1979), constitutive of theory (Morgan, 1980, 1983), and enabling of shared meanings, co-ordinated action, and even organization itself (Daft and Wiginton, 1979; Louis, 1983; Pandy and Mitroff, 1979; Smircich, 1983). Subsequent scholars have adopted a wide range of approaches to the analysis of organizational discourses and have conceptualized discourse itself, and its relevance to organizational interpretations, actions and subjectivity, in a variety of ways (Grant, Keenoy and Oswick, 1998; Heracleous and Hendry, 2000; Mumby and Stohl, 1991; Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

Discourse analysis, in the broad sense of utilizing textual data in order to gain insights to particular phenomena, has had a rich and varied heritage in the social sciences, spanning the fields of sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science and history (OConnor, 1995), and this same richness and diversity is evident in the organizational sciences. Approaches include hermeneutics (Kets de Vries and Miller, 1987; Phillips and Brown, 1993; Thachankary, 1992), ethnomethodology (Atkinson, 1988), rhetorical analysis (Alvesson, 1993; Keenoy, 1990; Watson, 1995), deconstruction (Kilduff, 1993; Noorderhaven, 1995), metaphorical analysis (Jacobs

¹ This chapter draws from Heracleous and Hendry (2000), Heracleous and Barrett (2001), and Heracleous (2004).

and Heracleous, 2006; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Ortony, 1979), critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1993; Garnsey and Rees, 1996; du Gay and Salaman, 1992; Knights and Morgan, 1991, 1995), narrative analysis (Barry and Elmes, 1997; Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1994), and semiotic analysis (Barley, 1983; Fiol, 1989).

Both discourse and related terms, such as language, text or narrative, have been conceptualized and categorized in diverse ways in organization theory (van Dijk, 1997; Grant, Keenoy and Oswick, 1998; Grant et al., 2004). In my work, I have employed the term “discourse” to mean collections of texts, whether oral or written, located within social and organizational contexts that are patterned by certain structural, inter textual features and have both functional and constructive effects on their contexts. In this sense, language can be seen as the raw material of discourse, and individual texts are both manifestations, and constitutive, of broader discourses (Heracleous, 2004 and Hendry, 2000).

In spite of the variety of conceptualizations and operationalizations, three dominant approaches to the study of organizational discourse can be discerned interpretive, functional, and critical (Heracleous, 2006; Heracleous and Barrett, 2001; Heracleous and Hendry, 2000). These approaches are not mutually exclusive, but they can be seen as analytically distinct. A key distinction has been made between interpretive and critical approaches to discourse (Mumby and Clair, 1997) that parallels the related distinction of research focusing on meaning construction processes or on issues of power (Oswick, Keenoy and Grant, 1997), as well as the distinction between monological accounts presenting the perspective of a dominant group and dialogical accounts presenting a multiplicity of conflicting perspectives and multiple realities (Boje, 1991; Grant, Keenoy and Oswick, 1998; Keenoy, Oswick and Grant, 1997).

Interpretive approaches conceptualize discourse as communicative action that is constructive of social and organizational realities. Functional approaches view discourse as a tool at actors’ disposal, to be employed for facilitating managerially relevant processes and outcomes such as effective leadership, employee motivation, and organizational change. Critical approaches conceptualize discourse as power knowledge relationships, constitutive of subjects’ identities and of organizational and societal structures of domination. The emerging structural approach finally views discourse as a

duality of communicative actions and deep structures, interrelated through the modality of interpretive schemes (Heracleous, 2006; Heracleous and Barrett, 2001; Heracleous and Hendry, 2000).

This conceptual diversity is symptomatic of a similar diversity of approaches to discourse in the social sciences more generally, and reflects long standing divisions between agent-centered and structuralist-oriented theories in sociology (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, Thompson, 1989). The interpretive and functional approaches to organizational discourse tend to privilege the action level, giving primacy to human agency, the hermeneutic nature of discourse at the individual and organizational levels, and how agents can employ discourse to shape their own or others' understandings of situations. The critical approach, on the other hand, tends to privilege the structural level, giving primacy to how human agency, identity and subjectivity are constituted, shaped, and may even be lost in the webs of discursive structures and the patterns of social domination that these structures surreptitiously help to legitimize and sustain. The structural approach, in line with Giddens's efforts to transcend the structure/agency dualism, aims to address both communicative actions and discursive deep structures as inherently interlinked and mutually constituted levels via actors' interpretive schemes, in which communicative actions are both a manifestation and instantiation of deep structures.

Organizational Texts and Contexts

As noted earlier, organizational discourses can be seen as collections of texts, both spoken and written. The term "text" has been interpreted in a variety of ways, with texts viewed broadly as "all types of data that contain messages and themes that can be systematized" (Kets de Vries and Miller 1987: 235; Phillips and Brown, 1993), for example structured patterns of actions and interpretations, or even organizations (Putnam, Phillips and Chapman, 1996: 391; Thachankary, 1992); as well as in a more literal way as primarily language-based artifacts (Gephart, 1993; Giddens, 1979).

An understanding of context is crucial to the interpretive validity and potential insight afforded by discourse analyses. According to Cicourel, "the study of discourse and the larger context of social interaction requires explicit reference to a broader organizational

setting and aspects of cultural beliefs often ignored by students of discourse” (1981: 102). Unfortunately, some approaches that began with interpretive or hermeneutic inspirations like ethnomethodology, stressing features of language such as indexicality (the notion that language use and interpretation depends on contextual features) and the temporality of social activity (where social action is understood and analyzed with regard to its temporal location), have gradually proceeded to restrict themselves to behaviorist straitjackets which can hinder them from grasping the richness of social life, as in the form most ethnomethodological conversation analysis has taken (Atkinson, 1988).

Fairclough has observed that in practice “analysis of text is perceived as frequently proceeding with scant attention to context discourse analysis needs a developed sense of and systematic approach to *both* context *and* text” (1992: 212–213). Fortunately, several useful approaches for integrating context in organizational discourse analysis have been developed. These include critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) social semiotics (Hodge and Kress, 1988; Kress, Leite-Garcia and van Leeuwen, 1997); rhetorical analysis (Aristotle, 1991; Gill and Whedbee, 1997); or ethnography of communication (Hymes 1964, 1972; Gumperz and Levinson, 1991).

From a sociological perspective, Giddens has suggested that the influence of structuralist and post-structuralist thought has encouraged the neglect of context and temporality in discourse analysis, indicating that although structuralism and post-structuralism have brought to the fore of social theory important issues such as the importance of temporality as reversible time, the properties of signification systems as existing outside time-space, and the relevance of decentering the subject, they are fraught with theoretical difficulties that make them unsuitable theoretical traditions through which the themes they have highlighted can be pursued (Giddens, 1979; 1987).

Saussures (1983) basic distinction between *langue* and *parole*, for example, and the emphasis on *langue*, is deemed as inadequate because it isolates language from its social environments of use and therefore does not promote the need for a theory of the competent speaker or language-user (Giddens, 1979). As a result, a conception of human subjects as agents has not been reached in structuralism, and

the theoretically decentered elements (such as the author) are not satisfactorily recombined in the analysis (Giddens, 1987).

Furthermore, because of the stress on form rather than substance, and because of the thesis of the arbitrary character of the sign (Saussure, 1983), structuralism and poststructuralism have promoted a “retreat into the code,” where the aim was “to determine the forces operating permanently and universally in all languages, and to formulate general laws which account for all particular linguistic phenomena historically attested” (Saussure, 1983: 6). This “retreat into the code” means that structuralism and post-structuralism have been unable to provide satisfactory accounts of reference, or of meaning. Meaning, for example, is said to derive from the intra- or inter textual play of differences of the signifiers, ignoring the relationship of such signifiers with their contexts of use (Giddens, 1987). The focus on the signifier/signified distinction as arbitrary has led to an elision between the “signified” and the “object signified,” the reality to which the sign is related (Giddens, 1979).

Further, Saussure's theoretical distinction between synchrony and diachrony has been utilized by structuralism as a methodological division, which is deemed unjustifiable because one can often gain a deeper understanding of linguistic and social systems in longitudinal rather than cross-sectional study (Lewin, 1952). The general “repression of time” in social theory has been attributed to the maintenance of this distinction between synchrony and diachrony, or statics and dynamics (Giddens, 1979).

While structuralism isolates texts from their contexts, a tradition such as hermeneutics stress their essential contextuality and the role of context in valid textual interpretations (Giddens, 1979). Ricoeur has defined hermeneutics as “the theory of the operations of understanding in relation to the interpretation of texts,” and posed as a key idea the transformation of spoken discourse in written text (1991: 53). Spoken discourse is seen as an event in that (1) it is realized temporally and in the present; (2) the “instance of discourse” is self-referential because it refers back to its speaker; (3) discourse is always about something: it refers to a world that it attempts to describe, express or represent; and (4) discourse is in practice addressed to an other (Ricoeur, 1991: 77–78).

Ricoeur argues, however, that as soon as discourse is “fixed” in writing as text, several hermeneutic issues emerge. First, whereas

discourse is realized temporally as a speech event, the written text fixes, in decreasing order of susceptibility to such fixing, the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of spoken discourse and divorces them from their temporal and social contexts. Second, whereas spoken discourse is self-referential in that it refers back to its speaker, the intended meanings of the author and the semantic meanings of the text do not necessarily coincide when spoken discourse is fixed as a text, because the text is open to a potentially unlimited series of interpretations. Third, whereas spoken discourse displays ostensive references deriving from the common situation and context within which the interlocutors find themselves, texts, divorced from such conditions, display non ostensive references, ideally projecting new possibilities of being-in-the-world – a concept that is for Ricoeur the ultimate referent of all texts. Finally, whereas spoken discourse is addressed at a specific interlocutor, texts are in principle available to anybody who can read (Ricoeur, 1991: 146–150).

On the basis of Ricoeur's distinction between spoken discourse and written text, I would suggest that organizational texts (not only oral communicative actions but also those fixed in writing) can be seen as implicated in particular conditions and imperatives which necessitate that they are understood and analyzed as being ontologically closer to spoken discourse than written text. This proposal can be clarified through a comparison of Roland Barthes' (1972, 1977, 1994) early structuralist and later post-structuralist conceptions of text, with the particular conditions that *organizational* texts tend to be implicated in.

Some Features of Organizational Texts

Organizational texts are often bound up with and shaped by, imperatives such as rules of communicative appropriateness in particular organizations, and overarching purposes as espoused by dominant coalitions. Further, due to the need for co ordination and collective action, organizational texts most often aim to display unambiguous references that suppress the plurality of meanings that, according to Barthes' (1977: 155–164) suggestions, should characterize texts. The organizational imperative of effective cross-functional coordination fosters demands for such organizational texts to have a relatively

unambiguous, representational (or informational) aspect, and to suppress the plurality of possible meanings.

The possibility of varying interpretations of organizational texts (or, in Barthian terms, a plurality of meanings) of course cannot be fully suppressed. But the imperatives of competitiveness and effective organizational processes tend to limit the signified. Time-starved, goal-oriented readers of organizational texts are usually not disposed in this context to write the text anew or metaphorically participate in textual production through active reading. The instance of the Barthian text is the signifier, but that of organizational texts is the signified. In this sense, organizational texts cannot practice “the infinite deferment of the signified” (Barthes, 1977: 158). They are thus potentially reducible, as opposed to Barthian text, which is not only plural but also irreducible (1977: 159).

The content of organizational texts, moreover, tends to be of a different, more intentional and indexical nature from that of other types of texts. Barthes (1994) does not make explicit to what types of narrative his structural analysis might apply, but the fleeting references to “the story,” the previous research on which he draws (Propp, Bremond, Todorov, Greimas, Levi-Strauss), many of the examples he uses (e.g. from James Bond movies), and the important part played by the actional level in his mode of analysis make it clear that the structural analysis of narrative, as developed by him, would be more suited to stories (at the social system level), novels, or myths. Organizational texts may not exhibit similar discourse-level structures to those discovered for stories, myths, or novels, and thus a homology of textual ontology and the analytical process between these texts cannot be assumed.

From the perspective of Barthian structuralist analysis, textual content would be of interest merely as a manifestation of deeper structures due to the assumed supremacy of form over substance (an idea originating from Saussure, 1983). In interpretive-oriented studies of the constructive role of discourse in organizations, this structural-level perspective needs to be complemented with consideration of textual content in its own right, in the light of the particular context, since the meaning of texts does not reside solely in intra- or inter textual relations but also in the dynamic interaction of these domains with the social context within which agents act (Giddens, 1987: 91).

With regard to textual functions, Barthes (1994) does not make clear in his structural analyses what functions stories or novels might have in their wider social context. “Functions” in Barthes structuralism relate solely to signifying units within the text, and do not refer to the interrelation of text with its social context. Barthes draws an analogy between narrative and linguistics, viewing narrative as a “great sentence” (1994: 99–100), and between narrative analysis and linguistic analysis holding that “just as linguistics halts at the sentence, the analysis of narrative halts at discourse” (1994: 127). In *Mythologies* (1972) his narrative analyses revealed critical concerns, relating to the unmasking of ideological processes working in the interests of the bourgeoisie, while in his “post-structuralist” period the consumption of the text was bound to “a pleasure without separation” (1977: 164).

Organizational texts on the other hand, as argued earlier, in addition to their constructive potential, tend to be imbued by a functional, representational nature that suppresses an infinite plurality of meanings due to the imperatives of systemic coordination, collective action, and organizational competitiveness. Organizational texts have particular functions in their social and organizational contexts; they are normally not concerned with the critical aims of unmasking social domination, and any pleasure they bring to the reader is incidental. The latitude of interpretation of organizational texts varies according to the type of text, but all texts have an underlying purposive construction by agents who have specific intentions in producing them for particular audiences, and intentionally wish to limit the potential plurality of textual meanings (except in special cases in which, for example, metaphorical discourse can aid organizational change processes because of its wide latitude of interpretation).

With regard to textual authorship, the structuralist tendency to “equate the production of texts with their inner ‘productivity’,” the decentering of the author, ultimately derives from the preoccupation with signifiers rather than signifieds (or the emphasis on form over substance), and often leads to an impression that texts wrote themselves (Giddens, 1987: 94–95). Organizational texts, in line with Barthes concept of “work,” however, are “caught up in a process of filiation” (1977: 160). Their authors are not “paper authors” (1977: 161) but flesh- and -blood individuals whom the audience knows and has opinions and thoughts about. Individuals referred to in

organizational texts are not “paper beings” (1994: 123) but people bound up with the textual context. Various characteristics of the author are highly relevant for the interpretation and persuasive potency of a text (Burgoon, Hunsaker and Dawson, 1994; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). This would not be the case for the kinds of stories, myths or novels that Barthian structuralist analysis was concerned with, however, where their interpretation (at least by readers if not by literary critics) does not depend on who the author is, and there is usually no immediate, context-dependent persuasive intention attached to them.

Temporality, in addition, is seen in structuralist approaches such as Barthes’ (1994: 112) as “only a structural class of narrative,” divorced from the texts social context. In analyzing organizational discourse to gain ideographic insights to social settings, however, temporality must ideally be considered in terms of real-time, recursive, and historical events. Organizational texts, especially intra-organizational ones, while “fixed” in writing (and thus according to Ricoeur available to anyone who can read and potentially subject to an unlimited series of interpretations), they are read, if at all, a relatively short amount of time after they are written and are usually read only once. Their functional, intentional relevance tends to diminish the longer they remain unread, and after a certain period of time the only individuals likely to have an interest in them are not organizational actors themselves but organizational researchers and historians. Such researchers, ironically, may themselves in fact be trying to utilize texts as a source of information in order to reconstitute retrospectively actual events or situations that they would have ideally preferred access to in real time but could not, because of various constraints.

The above discussion suggests that, because of the particular contextual conditions in which organizational texts are implicated, irrespective of whether they are spoken or written, they should be understood and analyzed more as spoken discourse or language-events (temporal, self-referential, representational, occurring among identifiable agents), rather than texts in a Ricoeurian or Barthian sense. This perspective, of course, does not discount or discourage a focus on such aspects as inter textual patterns and their constructive effects, or effects on agents’ subjectivity. What the above discussion suggests, however, is that attention to the various dimensions of organizational context is indispensable for higher validity in textual interpretations.

Analyzing Organizational Discourse

Discourse analysis approaches, at least as employed in organization theory, sociology and literary studies, are not methods in the positivist sense of precisely defined sequential steps in search of universally applicable laws, but rather approaches emphasizing hermeneutic, iterative journeys of discovery by (re)reading individual texts in the context of the whole and their social context and then (re)considering the whole as manifested in individual texts. Several authors have drawn attention to the unstructured, interpretive nature of discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Narrative analysis, for example, is said to be “rather loosely formulated, almost intuitive, using terms defined by the analyst” (Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1994: 465) discourse analysis is “neither systematic nor detailed” (Fairclough, 1992: 196) and deconstruction is “not reducible to a set of techniques, . . . [and] cannot be summarized as a mechanical series of operations to be applied to any piece of language” (Kilduff, 1993: 16). Barthes has on repeated occasions consciously refused to refer to his analyses as exemplifying a “method” which he saw as having positivistic connotations (Barthes, 1994: 223, 248, 263). Contrary to his early structuralist statements that narrative was to be studied in a deductive fashion, he later denounced an inductive deductive science of texts as illusory (Barthes, 1977: 159–160).

As discussed in more detail in chapter 2, this situation does not necessarily imply insufficient or inadequate methodological rigor, or degeneration to totally subjective opinions as a basis of textual interpretation. Rigor in organizational discourse analysis however has a different meaning than in positivism; replicability, especially in ethnographically oriented studies is not possible, and the search is for broad principles relating to the nature and functioning of social systems rather than mechanistic “universal laws” that would foster the same outcome if the technologies they imply are implemented in different settings. Discourse analysis aiming to identify such entities as genre repertoires (Orlikowski and Yates, 1994; Yates and Orlikowski, 1992), generative metaphors (Schön, 1979) or deep structures (Heracleous, 2006; Heracleous and Barrett, 2001) as opposed to more narrowly defined discursive aspects (e.g. turntaking in conversational analysis) is necessarily a loosely structured, interpretive exercise in

which the researchers own competencies and judgment are critical (Fairclough, 1992; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Similarly to ethnography, the pivotal role of the researcher has emphasized reflexivity (Heracleous, 2001) in organizational discourse research; the ability to consciously reflect on and codify how one's personal interests, biases and evaluations may have influenced the research process, the findings, and the researchers' own narrative.

*The Interpretive Approach: Discourse as Constructive of Social Reality*²

In the interpretive approach language as the basic building block of texts and discourses has been viewed not merely as an instrumental, intentional means of information exchange (a "representational" or "correspondence" view of language as evident in the early Wittgenstein) but primarily as constructive of social and organizational reality, through its framing effects on actors' thoughts, interpretations and actions (as evident in the late Wittgenstein). Both organization theory (Pondy and Mitroff, 1979; Weick, 1977) and the sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Moscovici, 1981, Ortony, 1979) have long recognized the constructive role of language in social life. After Pondy and Mitroff's (1979) call for the development of more complex understandings of organizations, researchers began to focus on interpretive frameworks emphasizing the social construction of meaning and the central role of language as a symbolic medium in constructing social reality (Donnellon, Gray and Bougon, 1986; Gray, Bougon and Donnellon, 1985; Pondy, 1983).

Even though a variety of theoretical traditions, with subtle differences, find a home under the umbrella of interpretivism, what they have in common is a commitment to an in-depth understanding of the actors' frame of reference, and a view of language as constructive rather than merely representational. Studies from an interpretive perspective have illustrated such issues as how language use as a

² Chapter 2 discusses a variety of prominent interpretive approaches to organizational discourse, as well as their analytical foci and implications.

symbolic process is central to the development and sustenance of shared meanings (Smircich, 1983) and a common identity for organizational members (Evered, 1983). The guiding motivation of the approach is to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of language in meaning construction processes, and to this end researchers have explored such elements or configurations of discourse as stories (Boje, 1991; Boyce, 1995; Hansen and Kahnweiler, 1993; Martin and Powers, 1983), humor (Hatch, 1997; Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995), and metaphor (Chilton and Ilyin, 1993; Crider and Cirillo, 1991, Tsoukas, 1991, 1993). To achieve these understandings, researchers in this tradition typically aim to study broader discourses (as collections of texts often exhibiting a variety of positions and voices) rather than just single texts (or sentences, a traditional concern of linguistics), with a concern of linking these discourses to their effects on agents' interpretations and actions within particular organizational and social settings.

The Functional Approach: Discourse as a Facilitator of Managerially Relevant Outcomes³

Building on insights of the interpretive approach to discourse, as well as on insights from a variety of other disciplines such as organization development and change management, researchers in the functional tradition have focused on how language can be applied to the facilitation of managerially relevant processes and outcomes such as the exercise of leadership (Pondy, 1978; Schein, 1992; Westley and Mintzberg, 1989), the emergence of effective and creative strategies (Heracleous and Jacobs, 2005; Liedtka and Rosenblum, 1996) and the management of organizational change (Barrett, Thomas and Hocevar, 1995; Ford and Ford, 1995; Westley and Vredenburg, 1996).

Ford and Ford (1995) for example, arguing that intentional change is based in and driven by particular types of linguistic communication, drew on speech act theory (Austin, 1961) to analyze the change process and its breakdown as a dynamic of conversations. Westley and Vredenburg (1996), drawing on theories of cultural change,

³ Chapter 3 discusses functional approaches in more detail, focusing on the role of metaphor in facilitating organizational change and development processes.

focused on the need for a constant realignment of interpretation and action within intentionally managed change processes and explored the role of metaphor in mediating between these. Barrett, Thomas and Hocevar (1995), conceptualizing change processes in terms of the social construction of meaning, stressed in particular the importance of dialogue as providing a medium for the evolution of language and consequent reconstruction of meaning within an organization.

Various studies of the role of metaphor in facilitating organizational change (Cleary and Packard, 1992; Marshak, 1993; Pondy, 1983; Sackmann, 1989) have highlighted the creative potential of metaphorical statements in enabling organizational actors to re-perceive reality in novel ways that can bridge the old state with the new. Finally, storytelling advocates suggest that various types of stories can be employed by managers to achieve particular outcomes (Denning, 2004), for example engaging the emotional commitment of internal and external stakeholders (Kaufman, 2003; McKee, 2003) or developing high-potential managers into leaders (Ready, 2002).

The more sophisticated variants of these studies draw on aspects of the interpretive approach, but the emphasis is different. Whereas interpretive studies focus on the emergent nature and effects of discourse on agents and the social context, and on the mutual constitution of discourses and contexts, functional research focuses on how managers, consultants, facilitators, and other actors can employ language to achieve certain outcomes. The functional view thus emphasizes the instrumental use of language-based communication to achieve managerially relevant outcomes, with discourse seen not so much as a medium for the social construction of meaning as a communicative tool at the actors' disposal⁴.

⁴ We do not use the term "functional" in exactly the same manner as employed in sociology, where functionalism is a paradigm drawing on organic analogies, aiming to explain the existence of social institutions and their features as ways of fulfilling biological and social needs of individuals. However there is a broad similarity in the sense that discourse in the functional stream is seen as a tool for achieving desired ends, i.e. having specific functions.

*The Critical Approach: Discourse as Constitutive of Structures of Domination*⁵

Critical discourse analysis shares with the approaches the interpretive concern exploring the social construction of reality, and the role of discourse in this process. It emphasizes, however, that the social construction of reality is not neutral or unbiased. Symbolic universes function not only as communicational and sensemaking mechanisms but also as legitimating ones (Giddens, 1984), representing different and potentially conflicting views of reality. Confrontations of symbolic universes are thus in effect power confrontations, in which “he who has the bigger stick has the better chance of imposing his definitions of reality” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 127). Critical discourse analysis aims to demystify situations, perceptions, and social practices that may be viewed as “natural” or taken for granted, but that have in effect been discursively constructed over time by groups in power aiming to skew social reality and institutional arrangements to their own advantage (Barthes, 1972; Gramsci, 1971).

Critical discourse analysis consists of a variety of approaches drawing from strands of critical theory within Western Marxism (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997), as well as from other critical theorists such as Foucault, particularly his latter genealogical work (1980) focusing on the intimate links between discourse and power. Critical discourse analysis is ethically committed to unmasking the processes through which discourses promote social constructions that support and perpetuate the interests of dominant groups or classes (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 1990). In this connection, discourses are not seen as neutral or unbiased, but as “sites of power” (Mumby and Stohl, 1991: 316) and as serving to entrench social practices (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258) as well as organizational practices (Jacobs and Heracleous, 2001) that produce particular sorts of subjectivity and identity (du Gay and Salaman, 1992).

Discourses are thus seen as imbued with ideological hegemony, the process by which dominant classes and groups attempt to construct

⁵ Chapter 4 offers an extended discussion of a Foucauldian critical approach, through a critical analysis of Foucault’s conceptions of discourse and their implications for organizational discourse analysis.

and perpetuate belief systems that support their own interests, and make the *status quo* appear commonsensical and natural (Barthes, 1972; Gramsci, 1971). Critical discourse analysis assumes that social representations (or shared cognitions) are principally constituted through discourse, or more succinctly, that “managing the mind of others is essentially a function of text and talk” (van Dijk, 1993: 254).

Critical discourse analyses thus follow interpretive, context-sensitive, often historical methodologies to empirically analyze discourses, discover how ideologies permeate and manifest in these discourses, and highlight discourses’ organizational and societal effects. In employing this approach, discourse analysts aim to bring about demystification and challenge of the *status quo* and thus, ideally, social change. The foci of analysis are often pressing social problems, such as racism, gender relations or ethnic tensions, not merely as a scholarly endeavor but as a committed form of social intervention.

Table 1.1 gives an outline of the three streams discussed, as well as of the structurational approach, as proposed by Heracleous and Hendry (2000), Heracleous and Barrett (2001), and Heracleous (2006).

*The Structurational Approach: Discourse as a Duality of Communicative Actions and Deep Structures Interrelated Through Interpretive Schemes*⁶

In tending to privilege the action level, interpretive and functional conceptions of discourse have constrained researchers from exploring the deeper discursive and social structures on which the very possibility of intentional communication depends, and through which that possibility is both enabled and constrained. The critical conceptualization of discourse as socially embedded power–knowledge relationships is much more sensitive to these aspects of social structure and context, but its decentering of the subject tends to downplay a view of the individual as an active agent, and affords little prospect of relating

⁶ Chapter 5 develops the structurational approach to discourse in some detail. This section will therefore give just a brief outline.

Table 1.1.1. Streams of Organizational Discourse Research

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Discourse seen as</i>	<i>Relation with the subject</i>	<i>Time frame and usual levels of application</i>	<i>Guiding motivation of approach</i>
Functional	Language-based communication, used instrumentally by social and managerial actors to achieve their ends	Discourse is a communicative tool at actors' disposal. Subjects use discourse for their ends rather than being trapped in it	Shorter-term managerial time frame (months or a few years); application at the organizational level	To facilitate managerially relevant processes and outcomes such as organization change or effective leadership
Interpretive	Communicative action exhibiting structural properties, and constructive of social and organizational realities	Subjects' social realities are constructed through discourse as a symbolic medium in the context of social interaction	Medium-term organizational time frame (a few years or decades); application at the organizational, social group or societal levels	To gain an in-depth understanding of the actors' point of view, and of the role of language in meaning construction processes
Critical	Power-knowledge relations—linguistically communicated, historically located and embedded in social practices. Subjects	Subjects' identity and rationality constituted by effects of elite discourses and other "technologies of power".	Longer-term historical time frame (decades or centuries); application at the social group or societal levels	Aspiration for radical social change through critical understanding of and demystification of relations of social domination

dominated by
 discursive structures
 and associated social
 practices

Structurational	A duality of deep discursive structures and surface communicative actions, interrelated through modality of interpretive schemes	Actors are purposeful, knowledgeable agents, both enabled and constrained by discursive structures	Medium-term Organizational time frame (a few years or decades); application at the organizational, social group or societal levels	In addition to interpretive motivations as noted above, to bridge dualisms of structure and action in social analysis through an encompassing metatheoretical framework
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Source: Adapted from Heracleous and Barrett (2001).

the structural level to functional concerns or the understanding of everyday social practices from the agents' own first order perspective.

A structurational view of discourse based on the work of Giddens (1979, 1984, 1987, 1993), and especially his theory of structuration (1979, 1984), has the potential to address both the action and the structure levels and their dynamic interrelation. Giddens has written relatively little about discourse, which has not been developed as a central construct in his theory (Gadacz, 1987), but he has done more than anyone to integrate structure and agency within a single conceptual framework (Thompson, 1989).

Drawing on structuration theory, discourse is viewed as a duality constituted by two dynamically interrelated levels: the surface level of communicative action and the deeper level of discursive structures, recursively linked through the modality of actors interpretive schemes. This view of discourse, elaborated by Heracleous and Hendry (2000), Heracleous and Barrett (2001) and Heracleous (2006), goes beyond understandings of discourse that focus on either structure or action and tend to advance a monolithic view of the relationship between discourse and the subject, and is able to encompass the interrelated action–structure levels and offer a more nuanced view of the discourse–subject relationship.

At the level of *communicative action*, discourse is constituted of communicative statements that occur in the context of social interaction when an actors purpose, or one of an actors purposes, is linked to the achievement of passing on information to others (Giddens 1993:94; cf. Austin 1961). In addition to their symbolic nature, communicative actions have a functional, intentional dimension; in this sense discourses not only say things but also do things (Oswick, Keenoy and Grant, 1997). These broad types of aims or intentions, which Habermas (1984) has identified respectively with the teleological, normative and dramaturgical models of action, come together in his encompassing communicative model of action (Habermas 1984: 94–96). Thus, at this level, discourse can usefully be seen as *situated symbolic action*⁷.

⁷ Chapter 6 develops in more detail a view of discourse as situated symbolic action, and illustrates an application of this view in an organizational context.

Discursive deep structures on the other hand are relatively stable, mostly implicit, and continually recurring processes and patterns that underlay and guide surface, observable events and actions (Heracleous and Barrett, 2001). They are persistent features of discourse that transcend individual texts, speakers or authors, situational contexts and communicative actions, and pervade bodies of communicative action as a whole and in the long term (Heracleous and Hendry, 2000). Discursive deep structures can be interpreted and operationalized by researchers in different ways⁸. Discursive deep structures should be understood in a structurational and not a structuralist sense. In structuralist approaches such as Foucault's (1972) archaeology, subjects actions, identities, and even their reason are said to be determined by and caught in the webs of anterior, pervasive discursive structures (Heracleous, 2006; Jacobs and Heracleous, 2001). From a structurational viewpoint, however, the various types of structures are seen as the rules and resources that actors draw on and enact in their daily practices and which have no other ontological existence than their instantiation in action, and in agents' interpretive schemes. In line with Giddens's concept of the duality of structure therefore, social structures and the discursive structures they are linked to are not separate from and determinative of human actions, but are both the medium and the outcome of such actions (Giddens 1984).

Interpretive schemes from a structurational perspective are the modality through which discursive structures are instantiated, or manifested, at the level of communicative interaction, and through which communicative interaction can reproduce or challenge such structures. A schema is a cognitive structure that consists in part of the representation of some stimulus domain (Taylor and Crocker, 1981: 91). Schemata operate at various levels of detail or abstraction, and are both evaluative and descriptive, serving basic and vital functions in the interpretation of experience and indication of appropriate action (Taylor and Crocker, 1981). The interaction between communicative actions and interpretive schemes is central to the construction

⁸ Chapter 7 presents a study that operationalized discursive structures as rhetorical strategies actualised through rhetorical enthymemes, or argumentations-in-action.

of social reality and to agents' actions based on their perceived reality (Gioia, 1986a,b). Shared cognitive schemes have a basic discursive aspect, as they are manifested, diffused and changed through 'text and talk' (van Dijk 1990:165).

Perhaps it would be useful at this point to briefly outline the distinctiveness and usefulness of the discourse lens for understanding organizations. Even though the book as a whole provides an answer to this question, we can say that firstly, the plethora of multi disciplinary antecedents to the field of organizational discourse (see e. g. Grant et al., 2004) provide a treasure trove of concepts, frameworks, and perspectives for organization studies. This becomes clear when one delves, for example, into the sociological literatures informing the interpretive approach, the managerial literatures informing the functional approach, or the literatures emerging from Western Marxism informing the critical approach. Secondly, through its focus on language in context, the discourse lens can provide rich access to the ideational, sense-making world of both individuals and organizations. Where as in-depth, qualitative research has necessarily been done with a high reliance on the medium of language (e.g. unstructured interviewing, field note-taking based on observations), what the discourse lens can add is theoretically informed, sophisticated frameworks for analyzing such textual data, with a conscious focus on the constructive role of language. Thirdly, a discursive approach, in common with other approaches such as ethnography, encourages researcher reflectivity. If researchers take seriously the idea that language as constructive, it becomes clear that research results do not simply report the data but also tell a story from the researcher's perspective and position; and the research process is itself selective, where the researcher's interests, biases, and views influence where attention is paid.

The field of organizational discourse is still young, but its appeal irresistible, its proponents productive, and its potential immense. Chapters 2–5 offer detailed discussions of the interpretive, functional, critical and structurational approaches to organizational discourse. Finally, chapters 6 and 7 offer illustrations of how specific approaches to discourse can be applied in empirical settings; in particular, a view discourse as situated symbolic action, and the structurational view of discourse.

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