Discourse and relationship between language structure and agency psychology essay...

Discourse can be defined as " forms of language use, usually spoken language or ways of speaking, whether public or private speech" (van Dijk, 1997: 2) studies of discourse have traditionally investigated the relationship between language, structure and agency. Approaches included under discourse studies, look to the study of spoken language are known as Conversational analysis, discourse analysis, discursive psychology and critical discourse analysis, each one fashioned by the different pioneers, different theoretical and methodological perspectives, through the varying disciplines of philosophy, anthropology to sociology and psychology. The notion of which has been the subject of much debate. As Lakoff (2001) states:

" each area has developed its own language, as nations will, intelligible to those within other areas of linguistics and even adjoining principalities. These boundaries are guarded jealousy and justified zealously. (Schiffrin, Tannen, Ehernberger Hamilton, 2003 : 200)

By looking at the methodology of the various approaches and the arguments within them will let us see if " things are more open in the social sciences" (Edwards, Hepburn, Potter, 2009) or if the different approaches guard their boundaries ' Zealously' (Lakoff 2001)

Conversation analysis emerged through ethnomethodology under the influence of Garfinkel and Goffman, who both sought to investigate how people understand and manage everyday life. Enthnomethodology takes a robust view of talk, as it put forward the idea that people actively accomplish social phenomenon. Conversation analysis seeks to look at the ' traditional

sociological enquiry' (Woofit, 2009) The term conversation analysis was pioneered through the work of Harvey Sacks in the 1960's in association with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson.

Social interaction is the basis of social life or in the words of Schegloff (1986) " Talk is the primordial site of sociality" (Heritage & Clayman, 2010) the primary aim of research in conversation analysis is to study talk not language, as conversation fails to capture the kinds of talk that conversation analysis is interested in. Conversation is seen as mundane chat or gossip, though conversation analysts are interested in formal life experiences such as institutional interaction within the media, legal and medical settings. Conversation analysis differs from other approaches to spoken language in theoretical, methodological and analytical techniques. Most discourses concentrate on the individual speaker, however Conversation analysis concentrates not just on how the speakers utterances are constructed on orderly turn taking. (Gardner, 1999)

All research within CA is naturally occurring, based on transcribed tape recordings of real interactions where participants. The transcriptions are detailed allowing the design to incorporate what was said and how it was said, enabling the participant to be analysts of their own talk, as the researcher brings no assumptions in to the research. However the presence of researchers recording can affect the conversation taking place, the Hawthorne effect. The highly detailed transcription method used by conversation analysts is time consuming compared to other transcription methods. However this is strength in CA as the studies can be replicated.

Conversation analysis can suffer from problems in its approach. Since conversational analysts are interested in institutional interaction, there can be a lengthy process in accessing institutional data. As Drew and Heritage (1992) state that professional lay interaction puts a domain limit in encounters, thus persuasion is primarily based upon expertise and practices of the professionals being asked. Therefore it can take years to gain consent to carry out research in institutional settings due to ethical considerations.

Discourse analysis has been described as an ' umbrella term' for varying approaches that have different theoretical origins and analysis of talk. Nikander (1995) Discourse analysis is multi-disciplinary in that its approach can be found within linguistics, semiotics, social psychology and political science. Zellig Harris coined discourse analysis in 1952; Harris wanted analysis the connection between speech and writing, seeking to describe how language features are distributed within texts that go ' beyond the sentence'. (Paltridge, 2000) Discourse analysis is interested in ' what happens to people when they draw on the knowledge they have they have about language.. to do things in the world. (Johnstone, 2002: 3) providing a deeper understanding of how texts become meaningful to their users (Chimbo and Roseberry 1998)

Gilbert and Mulkay adopted discourse analysis to describe their study of scientific dispute in biochemistry (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984) their aim was to discover the features of ' scientists discourse' by investigating how beliefs and actions were organised in ' contextually appropriate ways' (1984: 14) Gilbert and Mulkay established that scientific conversation presented in formal journals was different from the scientific conversation that was

spoken in informal interviews. The scientists had created a formal and informal framework through the use of ' interpretative repertoires' where scientists had accounted for truthfulness of their own work and other scientist's. The 'empiricist repertoire' was found to be dominant when it came to logical interpretation of formal experimental data. The contingent repertoire was based on speculation of results within informal settings such as scientist's social networks. Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) found that scientists needed two different sets of accounts to explain their results.

However discourse analysis began to take a specialised approach through discursive psychology and critical forms of discourse analysis. There was conflict between the goals of these approaches. As Discursive psychologists wanted to demonstrate the cognitive requisites used in interaction, thus drawing on the work of conversation analysis to apply social studies of science to social psychology (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984) Potter and Edwards wanted to leave the artificial laboratory settings of psychology and into the ecological settings where people normally, think, and act out their lives in the real world.

Psychologists focus on the cognitive and developmental aspects of language, such as memory and script information. DP generates a critical stance on cognitive theory in psychology, preferring to study argumentative and evaluative practices in discourse (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) DP explores the situated and occasioned rhetorical terms such as ' angry, jealous, feel and so forth, expressions such as " I don't know" are studied for contrasts and interaction in the context they were used. (Edwards, 1995) the role of emotions has been studied through emotional states in personal narratives

within relationship disputes. (Edwards, 1997a) The way in which people understand and act in these situations is approached through a cognitive script where people describe things as routine and act on these descriptions. (Edwards, 1997a)

In contrast critical discourse analysis sought to recognize the ' structural and political implications' of discursive psychology. Critical discourse analysis is a type of analytical research that aims to study the way in which social power; abuse, dominance and inequalities are played out within the social and political arena. (Agger, 1992b) CDA is associated with the work of Fairclough, who adopts a Marxist viewpoint on social conflict, CDA is used to identify inequalities and conflict from capitalism emphasising the importance of the means of production.(Fairclough, 1989) Van Dijk gives thought to the function of cognition when interpreting the texts, arguing that in order to understand inequalities we have to look at the role of social cognitions and representations that emerge from social activities. By studying verbal interaction in racism will show " discourse structures that signal underlying bias" (van Dijk, 1993b: 262) lastly, Wodak in contrast seeks to identify the wider operation of power and dominance within the context of discourse. (Woodak, 2001b)

Unlike conversational analysis, which has a distinctive set of methodological principles, research within CDA can vary in focus and style. There is no set cannon in the collection of data in CDA. However this can be CDA's downfall, as it cannot be replicated like conversation analysis. Regardless of the differences within the research styles, all critical discourse analysts want to

understand the broader features of social inequality. Thus CDA has a clear political agenda. (Woofit, 2010)

CDA analysts want reveal the ' role of discourse' in exploring the top down approach of dominance. However CDA fails to answer how language can be assembled or prepared to oppose these inequalities of power in interaction.

Many social scientists consider overlaps in conversation analysis and discourse analysis as similar approaches are used. Both Conversation analysis and Discourse analysis were influenced by ethnomethodology. As ethnomethodology itself developed, not just to engage with issues relating to language, meaning or communication, but as a general approach to the study of social interaction (Heritage 1995) Sacks work focused on the communicative capabilities of ordinary every day conversation. Although in discourse analysis the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) was not ethomethodological, Garfinkels work was influential in Potter and Wetherells (1987) development of discourse analysis. Ethomethodological research was used to highlight people's own sense making in social psychology through the constructive and constitutive properties of ordinary language.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) have used the detailed Jefferson transcription method that is specific to Conversation analysis in their work; Potter and Wetherell (1987) have also used Gilbert and Mulkays study (1984) of scientists repertoires used when scientists argue with each other, by using the idea of interpretative repertoires to study how the New Zealander Pakeha constructed accounts of social conflict and organized versions of relations between groups, helping to understand the reproduction of

inequality and privilege. However Hammersley (2003a) argues that both conversation analysis and discourse analysis do not offer a new design to the social sciences, as conversation analysis is too ethnomethedological in its approach and the discourse analysis method is too constructionist. Leading to arguments in methodology between the approaches.

The first dispute is between Conversational analysis and Critical discourse analysis. One side of the argument states that conversation analysis cannot tackle the topics, which are fundamental to traditional sociological enquiry, in relation to power and the role of ideologies. On the other side Critical discourse analysis, which analyses relationships between dominance, discrimination, power and control in language is criticized for interpreting an analysts reflection of political orientations which obscures what is significant to the participant (Schegloff, 1997) To illustrate Schegloff examines a telephone conversation between a man and woman. Schegloff notes that the man frequently butts into the conversation while the woman is still talking, these interruptions could be viewed as an unequal distribution of power and status between men and woman. Schegloff argues these overlaps of interruption are not down to inequalities of power, merely a case of men missing the social cues in turn taking.

Billig (1999a) criticises Schegloff, stating that the methodology used in CA ' obscures' the argumentative nature of talk, of how power influences our lives. Widdowson (1995) states that CDA constantly sits on the fence between social research and political argumentation while other critics accuse CDA of being too linguistic or not linguistic enough. (Wodak, 2001a) Wetherell (1998) on the other hand understands that the theory used in

discourse analysis can result in under grounded analysis, and welcomes the rigorous description of interaction offered by CA. Nevertheless she argues that exclusive focus on the details of interaction fails to provide a complete appreciation of the organisation of talk. In other words CA is to busy with its nose in the transcripts. Wetherell suggests drawing from a post structuralist approach to provide a rounded account (Such as Laclau and Mouffe) (Woofit, 2010)

This leads us to disagreements about the methodology of discursive psychology where Coultard (2002) argues that Discursive Psychology is only concerned with overt talk about mental states from McHoul and Rapely,

Coulter views discursive psychology as ' a thesis which proposes that the human mind and its various properties are generated in and through discourse: in essence, the ' mind' is revealed in and through analyseable features of the things that people say and do through their talk' (Coulter, 1999: 163).

Coulter argues that the ' mind' is not a ' thing' of any class that can be ' talked into being' as the ' mind' is a an abstract term created by psychologists for terms such as ' he changes his mind' or ' it slipped my mind' and so on, which Coulter calls ' contextual paraphrases'. As Coulter believes Discursive psychologists over analysis the thing that people say and do through talk. The problem with this is that it restricts the request for everyday language to that which is only revealed explicatively, thus the ' mental' is interpreted by the conditions of what people say about it. Stating that the abstract cognitive script used by Discursive psychology takes a

distinctive Cartesian dualism approach, which is restrictive and misleading (Coulter, 1999)

Coulter argues that discursive psychologists are occupied in an entirely empirical venture when they discuss hypothetical" questions relating to cognitive and mental approaches. Discursive psychologists have produced empirical data of perceptions in mental processes; more evidence is needed to explain how these perceptions are used in people's everyday lives, as Coulter states that randomly selected abstract samples of discourse will not prove anything, as people have been known to misuse words which have never been grammatically corrected. (Coulter, 1999)

Coulter quotes Wittgenstein (1958) stating

" that what we are calling ' mental state avowals' (i. e., descriptions of one's own thoughts and feelings) do not and could not obtain their meaning from ' referring to' privately experienced mental states."

Therefore Coultar is arguing that even if the " thing in the box" exists, it should play no part in our language. (Coultar, 2005).

However Potter and Hepburn state that the view of Discursive psychology as given by Coulter is wrong. The aim of discursive psychology is not to get inside peoples heads to get these ' things that people say'. Rather the focus on discourse is on texts and talk in social practices, Discourse analysis looks for psychology in an entirely different place.

The cognitive scripts that Coulter calls Cartesian, look at experience, emotion and intention in terms of how the person interprets the interaction.

(Edwards and Potter, 1992) As Edwards (1994) says a mental state is not being expressed when people put forward a belief of a situation, its more of a case of how they perform a social act such as ' blaming someone' or ' giving a compliment'. People have a vested stake or interest that favours their particular version of events, a ' stake inoculation' The persons motives are crucial in establishing or undermining contested versions of events as factual or ' stake management' (Edwards and Potter, 1992)

Edwards and Potter use an example of a counselling session between husband and wife (Connie and Jimmy) who describe their problems. Connie describes Jimmy as an extremely jealous man. Jimmy makes a comment of " I don't know" in regards to his wife's short skirt. It would be easy just assume that Jimmy was being ignorant and paying attention to his wife's skirt. What " I don't know" does is plays down the speakers stake or interest in the content of the description. (Potter, 1998b) Therefore the script shows Jimmy is an extremely jealous guy. Edwards states that discursive psychology is more than just placing overt ' psychological words' to handle ' psychological categories'.

After looking at the methodology of the various approaches and the arguments within them, things are not ' more open in the social sciences' as Edwards, Hepburn, Potter, (2009) stated earlier. It has been a case that the different approaches guard their boundaries (Lakoff 2001)

Researchers within Conversation analysis guard their methodological principles as if it was the canon through a ' traditional sociological enquiry' (Woofit, 2009) Discourse analysts have an empirical stance through the use

of ' interpretative repertoires as their canon. Critical discourse analysis has no set method for collecting data; therefore it has no set canon. However all three approaches do state their approach is from a sociological perspective.

Discursive psychology is coming from a psychological perspective by using the cognitive mental processes in getting people to interpret their own interaction. Discursive psychologists argue their canon is not psychological and does not use cognitive memory or scripts. Even Coultar (1999) argued that Discursive psychologists use Cartesian methods and could not give back a reliable answer to what method they do use. As Discursive psychologists have used conversation analysis methodology (ethnomethodology and the Jefferson transcript) in their research. Where Discursive psychologists still guard their new found canon as if it was their bible.

In my final thought I would have to say that each approach brings something different in to the field of discourse, as each approach interprets talk in different ways. Therefore criticism within the approaches is good as it generates new thoughts, ideas and findings.