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Introduction: Organizational Discourse: Exploring the Field

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Introduction: Organizational Discourse: Exploring the Field

A growing disillusionment with many of the mainstream theories and methodologies that underpin organizational studies has encouraged scholars to seek alternative ways in which to describe, analyse and theorize the increasingly complex processes and practices that constitute 'organization'. One outcome of this search has been that 'organizational discourse' has emerged as an increasingly significant focus of interest. It is now difficult to open a management or organizational journal without finding that it contains some sort of discursive-based study, and there has been a recent flurry of books, edited collections and journal special issues dedicated to the topic (Boje et al, 2004; Grant et al, 1998a, 2001; Hardy et al., 2004; Iedema & Wodak, 1999; Keenoy et al., 1997, 2000a; Oswick et al., 1997, 2000a, 2000b; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Putnam & Cooren, 2004). Interest also extends to the establishment of a biennial International Conference on Organizational Discourse, which has been running since 1994, and the creation of an International Centre for Research in Organizational Discourse, Strategy and Change[2] that links organizational researchers worldwide.

The growth in interest in organizational discourse has seen researchers apply a range of discourse analytic approaches to language and other symbolic media that are discernible in organizations. In so doing, they have been able to analyse, engage with and interpret a variety of organization-related issues in ways that would not have been otherwise achievable. At the same time, some have observed that this growth appears to have been achieved through the widespread use of broad, nonspecific definitions and a bewildering array of methods, approaches and perspectives. In short, how people talk about and analyse organizational discourse varies considerably.

The variation in the way that researchers talk about and analyse organizational discourse can, in part, be attributed to its theoretical and disciplinary antecedents emanating from the broader domain of discourse analysis: discourse analysis is informed by a variety of sociological, sociopsychological, anthropological, linguistic, philosophical, communications and literary-based studies (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a, 2000b; Grant et al., 1998b, 2001; Keenoy et al, 2000a; Oswick et al., 2000a; Potter & Wetherall, 1987). Within the broader social sciences, it has been used in order to promulgate various positivist, social constructivist and postmodern perspectives about a range of social phenomena (Brown & Yule, 1983; Fairclough, 1995; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Schiffrin, 1987; Silverman, 1993; Van Dijk, 1997a, 1997b). Despite some integration of work in, for example, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, sociology and ethnography, discourse analysis in the social sciences for the most part remains disparate and fragmented, and characterized by a number of debates and tensions. As Van Dijk (1997a, p. 3) puts it, 'given the different philosophies, approaches and methods in their various "mother disciplines", the various developments of discourse analysis [have] hardly produced a unified enterprise'.

The field of organizational discourse has borrowed extensively from the wider discourse analytic literature and exhibits similar characteristics. Unlike Van Dijk, however, we do not see this as problem. Rather, we see the diversity of approaches and perspectives as indicative of organizational discourse as a *plurivocal project* and argue that such an approach is the best way of ensuring that the field makes a meaningful contribution to the study of organizations. Accordingly, the purpose of this *Handbook* is to demonstrate the plurivocal nature of organizational discourse for the benefit of those who wish to familiarize themselves with the field or who are contemplating utilizing a discursive approach to the study of organizational phenomena for the first time, as well as those already carrying out organizational discourse

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research, and who wish to enhance their understanding of it.

The *Handbook* is divided into four sections. Part I, *Domains of Discourse*, focuses on specific discursive domains or 'forms' of organizational discourse. Part II, *Methods and Perspectives*, plots the contrasting methodological approaches and epistemological views that may be discerned among those studying organizational discourse. Part III, *Discourses and Organizing*, comprises chapters that draw on a variety of discursive perspectives and approaches in order to show how discursive activity produces and mediates different organizational phenomena. Part IV, the final section of the *Handbook*, is titled *Reflections*. It comprises three pieces in which eminent contributors consider the value of organizational discourse to the broader field of organizational studies, reflect on chapters presented in the *Handbook* and suggest future avenues of research.

The remainder of this chapter provides an introductory overview of the field of organizational discourse by using the structure and content of the *Handbook* to explore what organizational discourse comprises. We then discuss key areas of debate and discussion within the field, and identify some of the challenges it faces. We conclude by highlighting the significance of organizational discourse in terms of its contribution to our understanding of organization. However, we also note that while there has been a recent growth in the number of studies of organizational discourse, it remains a relatively underutilized avenue of enquiry whose contributions have not been fully realized. We assert that there is considerable further scope for its application, and advocate more discourse-focused research on the basis of the potentially considerable insights that it offers.

Exploring Organizational Discourse

The term 'organizational discourse' refers to the structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual representations and cultural artefacts) that bring organizationally related objects into being as these texts are produced, disseminated and consumed (Grant et al., 1998b; Parker, 1992; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Consequently, texts can be considered to be a manifestation of discourse and the discursive 'unit' (Chalaby, 1996) on which the organizational discourse researcher focuses. They signify collections of interactions, media of communication (i.e., oral, print, electronic), or assemblages of oral and written forms (Putnam & Cooren, 2004). Such a definition demonstrates that those studying organizational discourse are often interested in the social constructionist (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Searle, 1995) effects of language in organizational settings (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). As Mumby and Clair point out:

> Organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse. This is not to claim that organizations are 'nothing but' discourse, but rather that discourse is the principle means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are. (1997, p. 181)

In line with Mumby and Clair's observation, this *Handbook* shows how the everyday attitudes and behaviour of an organization's members, along with their perceptions of what they believe to be reality, are shaped and influenced by the discursive practices in which they engage and to which they are exposed or subjected. In short, the *Handbook* highlights the fact that discursive practices in organizations 'do not just describe things; they do things' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 6).

In studying how discourse shapes organizing processes, researchers engage with discourse

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in different ways. Table 1 distinguishes between studies that focus on domains of discourse, studies that highlight methodological and epistemological issues, and studies of discourses of organizing. Combined, this material provides helpful resources that can be used to explore the field of organizational discourse and build a more meaningful and useful definition than has hitherto been provided. In particular, it serves to demonstrate that organizational discourse is in fact a plurivocal project–one where a range of approaches and perspectives coexist.

Domains of Organizational Discourse

Researchers have shown particular interest in specific domains or 'forms' of discourse that are to be found in organizational texts. Part I of this *Handbook* focuses on four domains that are particularly prevalent in studies of organizational discourse: conversation and dialogue, narratives and stories, rhetoric and tropes. In no way do we claim that these domains are exclusive–we have chosen them because they are widely studied in the field and make a significant contribution to our understanding of organizational discourse.

Table 1: Organizational discourse by modes of engagement

Domains of Discourse		Methodological & Epistemological Perspectives		Discourses & Organizing	
Texts are a manifestation of discourse and the discursive unit upon which the organizational discourse researcher focuses. A number of domains are regarded as constituting texts.		Methodological approaches and epistemological perspectives that inform the study of organizational discourse and the various texts therein.		Application of discourse analytic approaches to a variety of organizational phenomena.	
Examples	Related *Handbook* chapter(s)	Examples	Related *Handbook* chapter(s)	Examples	Related *Handbook* chapter(s)
Conversation & dialogue	Gergen et al., Ch. 1.	Language in use • Conversation analysis • Speech act schematics • Interaction analysis	Fairhurst & Cooren, Ch. 5.	Gender	Ashcraft, Ch. 12.
		Context sensitive • Pragmatics	Ainsworth & Hardy, Ch. 6.		Har

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Narratives & stories	Gabriel, Ch. 2.	• Sociolinguistics • Institutional dialogue • Social semiotics • Critical discourse analysis	Heracleous, Ch. 7. Deetz et al., Ch. 8. Prichard et al., Ch. 9. analysis	Power	dy & Phillips, Ch. 13.
Rhetoric	Cheney et al., Ch. 3.	Exposition of plurivocality	Mumby Ch. 10. Kilduff & Keleman, Ch. 11.	Culture	Alvesson, Ch. 14.
Tropes	Oswick, Putnam & Keenoy, Ch. 4.			Technology	Heath et al., Ch. 15.
				New media	Orlikowski & Boczkowski, Ch. 16.
				Globalization	Fairclough & Thomas, Ch. 17.

CONVERSATION AND DIALOGUE Both conversation and dialogue have been defined as a set of interactions that are produced as part of the talk or message exchange between two or more people (Collins, 1981; Eisenberg & Goodall, 1993; Ford & Ford, 1995; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001; Taylor & Van Every, 1993; Westley, 1990). Conversations happen over time and are connected through time. This means that texts only exist as part of the same conversation if they are in some way responsive to each other, either directly or indirectly (a rhetorical connection), and are produced through chronologically sequenced discursive acts (a temporal connection) (Collins, 1981; Ford & Ford, 1995; Westley, 1990). On this basis,

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consequential action in organizations is not so much the result of disconnected utterances or isolated texts but, rather, is produced through ongoing linguistic and textual exchanges among organizational actors that draw on broader discourses and produce discursive objects that act as resources for action and for further conversations (Fairclough, 1992; Taylor et al., 1996). Moreover, the texts that constitute conversations are 'intertextual' (see discussion of context sensitive approaches to discourse and intertextuality below). For example, Ford and Ford (1995) show how the forms of conversation associated with initiating organizational change are those that identify a need for change. From a discourse perspective, any such 'need for change', be it in the shape of an environmental shift, an organizational problem or a political agenda, is a discursive object that, once produced, is available for use by other interested actors that can support it with reference to broader discourses, such as 'strategic change' or 'profitability' (see Hardy et al, 2003).

Studies of dialogue in organizations focus on it as a mode of communication that builds mutuality through awareness of others and as an instance of unfolding interaction (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1993; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). In this respect, and unlike conversation with its strong temporal and rhetorical orientation, dialogue can be seen more as a momentary accomplishment (Cissna & Anderson, 1998). Drawing on the work of, for example, Bakhtin (1981), Buber (1958), Bohm (1996), and Eisenberg and Goodall (1993), studies of dialogue in organizations have sought to show how it is used to generate new meaning and understanding, create space in which to question and critique, and play a mediating function that can lead to a convergence of views (Gergen, 1994, 1999; Gergen et al, 2001; Hawes, 1999; Thatchenkery & Upadhyaya, 1996).

In the opening chapter to the *Handbook* Kenneth Gergen, Mary Gergen and Frank Barrett demonstrate how texts acquire significance through dialogue and show the importance of this relational process to organizing. Their chapter shows how the generative, degenerative and transformational properties of dialogue may impact on the organization's well-being to the extent that they may restore its vitality or may lead to its demise. Given these properties and their potential effects, the authors express some concern with the way that the significance of dialogue has hitherto been downplayed in organizational studies and suggest that all too often organizations themselves neglect to institute practices that facilitate dialogue in the workplace. To these authors, an increasing interest in studies of organizational discourse is to be welcomed since it may encourage studies that expand our knowledge and understanding of dialogue and thus its practical application in organizational situations.

NARRATIVES AND STORIES Another important domain of study within organizational discourse is that of narratives and stories. Narrative analysis takes into account the context in which the narrative is being used and constructed. In certain respects, it can be seen as a literary form of analysis, in that it approaches narratives and stories as symbolic and rhetorical devices. Organizational researchers have used narrative analysis to show how narratives and stories are produced through a variety of verbal and written discursive interactions. It is widely used in organizational studies, having become an especially popular approach to the study of discourse among critical and postmodern scholars. Narrative analysis focuses on the topics, ideas, characters and plots within a particular text or texts. Narratives are thematic in that they tell a story; sometimes true, sometimes fictional. Moreover, they are co-constructed; they are not only authored by those who introduce them, but also by their readers and various interlocutors, who engage with them and influence the direction that they may take. They may also function ideologically so as to represent the interests of a particular group (Boje, 1995, 2001; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1996, 1997, 1998; Gabriel, 1991, 1995, 1997, 1998; Mumby, 1987; Phillips, 1995). Several authors (Brown, 2000, 2004; Dunford & Jones, 2000;

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Wallemacq & Sims, 1998) have noted how narratives are integral to the process of sense-making (Weick, 1995) in organizations. In short, narratives are fundamental to the way in which we think about ourselves and how we interact with one another (Ochs, 1997).

By exploring the narrative content of various texts–for example, conversations, dialogue, official documentation, newspaper articles and Internet sites–narrative analysis can provide insight into how meaning is socially constructed and action is generated within organizations (Brown, 1990). Accordingly, narratives have been studied as elements of organizational culture (Hansen & Kahnweiler, 1993; Mahler, 1988; Salzer-Morling, 1998), as shared identity among organizational members (Brown, 1990; Meyer, 1993) and as expressions of political domination and opposition (Collinson, 1988, 1994; Gabriel, 1995; Rosen, 1984, 1985). They have also been used to examine organizational policy, strategy and change (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Beech, 2000; Boje, 1991; Brown, 2000; Brown & Humphreys, 2003; Currie & Brown, 2003; Dunford & Jones, 2000; Feldman, 1990; Washbourne & Dicke, 2001).

For Yiannis Gabriel, narratives and stories feature prominently as sense-making devices in organizations which, because of their constructed and contested nature, have important implications for the processes and practices of organizing. Gabriel uses his chapter to argue that, despite their current popularity with organizational researchers and consultants, stories and narratives are in fact quite special events in organizations and that our ability to identify the texts of such stories and narratives is all too often lost in a myriad of other discourses used to express information, opinions and theories that reflect preoccupations with efficiency, rationality and action. Gabriel also suggests that in recent years the concept of stories in particular has become ‘too comfortable’ to the extent that what once seemed a provocative and innovative approach to the study of organizational phenomena seems to have become an unquestioned truth and accepted norm. Thus, part of the purpose of this chapter is to ‘reproblematize’ the idea of stories by pointing out that they can be vehicles of oppression and can lead to dissimulation and oppression (Helmer, 1993; Mumby, 1987; Witten, 1993). Moreover, stories do not deny the importance or existence of facts; rather they allow them to be reinterpreted and embellished. They therefore become powerful and potentially dangerous tools in the hands of certain individuals within social, and more specifically, organizational contexts.

RHETORIC Narrative and stories are but one domain of discourse, the study of which allows us to consider how discourse can be used in order to achieve particular ends. The study of rhetorical devices has also offered insights into this aspect of discourse. This approach looks at symbols within the organization to examine the way they shape messages and message responses (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001; Watson, 1994, 1995). Approaches that focus on rhetoric draw on classic definitions and theories of argumentation in order to demonstrate how particular features and forms of discourse are used in relation to a variety of organizational practices. For example, several studies examine the way symbolic and rhetorical devices are used to communicate corporate image and strategy as well as to shift blame and distance the organization from a problem (Barton, 1993; Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Campbell et al., 1998; Coombs, 1995; Grant, 1999; Keenoy & Anthony, 1992). Other studies have looked at rhetorical devices, such as argumentation in relation to decision-making and bargaining and negotiation (Hamilton, 1997; Putnam, 2004; Putnam & Jones, 1982; Putnam et al., 1990; Roloff et al., 1989).

Rhetoric is the focus of George Cheney, Lars Christensen, Charles Conrad and Daniel Lair's chapter showing the way rhetoric is deployed in organizations and the reasons that lie behind its use. As such, it demonstrates that the study of the rhetoric in organizations, in contrast to

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most other domains of organizational discourse, is concerned primarily with discourse's strategic dimensions. Perhaps most significantly, it points out a natural link between rhetorical and organizational studies in that the persuasive effects of rhetoric are organizational and that rhetoric is embedded in what we take to mean 'organization'.

TROPES As Putnam and Fairhurst (2001) point out, rhetoric is infused with a variety of literary devices, the most significant of which are the four classic (or master) tropes of metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy and irony (Manning, 1979; Morgan, 1983; White, 1978). The trope of metaphor is the medium through which two separate conceptual domains are compared, with the more abstract one understood in terms of the more concrete one (Grant & Oswick, 1996a; Morgan, 1980). Synecdoche and metonymy are often confused. Both involve the mapping or connection between two things within the same domain (e.g., a part-whole or a wholepart substitution) or between closely connected domains (e.g., a cause and effect relationship) (for a detailed discussion of these features, see Gibbs, 1993). Finally, irony involves the use of the discourse in an unconventional way to describe some thing that is paradoxical or contradictory. It exists when an unexpected outcome or surprising twist comes from the way a situation evolves opposite of what was intended (Westenholz, 1993).

The study of the master trope of metaphor in particular has contributed to organizational analysis in a number of ways. Metaphor's generative qualities are perceived to enable new knowledge production and to provide innovative new perspectives of organizational theory and behaviour. Accordingly, metaphors have been variously used as theory-building and methodological tools (Alvesson, 1993; Brink, 1993; Grant & Oswick, 1996b; Morgan, 1980, 1983, 1986, 1996; Oswick & Grant, 1996a; Putnam et al., 1996; Tsoukas, 1991). There have also been numerous studies that have sought to examine metaphors that pervade organizational discourses related to particular organizational phenomena. For example, a raft of studies have sought to examine the role and application of metaphor in relation to organizational change (e.g., see Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990; Broussine & Vince, 1996; Clark & Salaman, 1996a, 1996b; Dunford & Palmer, 1996; Marshak 1993, 1996; Morgan, 1997; Oswick & Grant, 1996b; Oswick & Montgomery, 1999; Sackmann, 1989; Srivastva & Barrett, 1988; Warner-Burke, 1992).

To Oswick, Putnam and Keenoy tropes are a prevalent feature of any form of text and are thus an inevitable and unavoidable facet of organizational life. It is this feature that makes them a significant domain of study within organizational discourse. While research on the application of metaphor to the study of organizations is prevalent, these authors point out that other tropes have received much less attention. Their chapter explores the ways that metaphors are applied to organizations and concentrates on an alternative cluster of tropes, notably irony. This approach leads to an innovative framework that enables researchers to identify discrepancies and dissonance within organizations. In doing so, their chapter can be seen as extending the application of tropes to the study of organizations.

Methodological and Epistemological Perspectives

Some researchers are less interested in the specific domains of discourse and instead engage with organizational discourse through more explicit consideration of underlying methodological and epistemological issues, some of which are explored in Part II of the *Handbook*. A sweep of the pertinent literature (see, e.g., Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a, 2000b; Grant et al., 1998a, 2001; Hardy et al, 2004; Iedema, 2003; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001; Woodilla, 1998) suggests that one key methodological issue relates to whether studies place an emphasis on language in use as opposed to language in context,

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while an important epistemological issue relates to the exposition of plurivocality.

In considering methodological approaches we wish to draw attention to two important issues. First, we are not seeking to look at the specific methods of analysis that are applied as a result of the researcher adopting a particular methodological approach. In this respect we are drawing a distinction between methodology and methods along the lines advocated by Schwandt (1997, p. 93): '"Methodology" is… the theory of how inquiry should proceed. It involves analysis of the principles and procedures in a particular field of inquiry that, in turn, govern the use of particular methods'. Secondly, we acknowledge that several classifications of the various methodological approaches used to examine organizational discourse have already been proposed. For example, Putnam and Fairhurst (2001) link methodology to many of the kinds of disciplinary distinctions to be found in descriptions of traditional linguistics and communications departments: sociolinguistics, semiotics, critical linguistics, pragmatics, and so on. In doing so, they provide a comprehensive overview of language research carried out in organizational settings. Focusing on related domains of enquiry, Woodilla offers a similar but somewhat simplified classification. She isolates three main areas of organizational research methods: conversational analysis, pragmatic linguistics and critical language theory (Woodilla, 1998, p. 32). In our view, however, it is important to move away from classifying methodologies purely by virtue of their disciplinary antecedents. While it remains useful to note these antecedents, the methodologies themselves no longer lend themselves to being delineated in terms of a particular field of academic provenance. As the following discussion demonstrates, any examination of the range of methodological approaches applied by those who practise organizational discourse research must therefore come to terms with the multiplicity of influences that currently pervades the field. It must also recognize that, as a result of the field's multifaceted nature, the methodological approaches employed are likely to be quite complex and overlapping. Consequently, studies of organizational discourse may draw on several methodologies at the same time.

LANGUAGE IN USE Approaches to the study of organizational discourse that focus on language in use seek to provide a detailed examination of talk and texts as instances of social practice. They concern talk-in-interaction (Silverman, 1999) and in many instances can be said to be ethnomethodological in orientation in that they explore the role of discourse in shaping social order in everyday organizational conduct (Boden, 1994; Pomerantz & Fehr, 1997; Sacks et al, 1974). For these studies what is important is to understand the organizing properties of discourse, that is how what happens during a particular discursive interaction impacts on the actions and behaviour of individuals. Accordingly, they place emphasis on capturing and analysing discourse as a discrete moment that occurs in the present.

Approaches that employ methodologies of language in use focus on 'the machinery', 'rules' and 'structures' that are located within a particular discursive interaction (Psathos, 1995). These approaches reveal the recurrent features of talk–known as 'interactive constants' (Schegloff, 1984, 1996). These include, participants' side sequences, repair strategies and turn-taking strategies. Language in use approaches also include examination of the ways in which people use particular words or phrases to invoke actions. While the term 'language in use' denotes an emphasis on verbal interactions, this interpretation is misleading. As Pomerantz and Fehr have pointed out when discussing conversation analysis (CA):

> Conversation analysts from the outset have been interested in both the verbal and the paralinguistic features of talk (that is, sound quality, pauses, gaps, restarts etc.) In fact the actions constituted in and through speaking can be difficult or impossible to identify without attention to both. Moreover, a number of researchers have

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> expanded the scope of CA to include the visually available features of conduct such as appropriate orientation, hand-arm gestures, posture etc. (1997, p. 65)

Conversation analysis is one of three approaches to the study of language in use discussed by Gail Fairhurst and François Cooren. The other two are interaction analysis (Bakeman & Gottman, 1986; Holmes & Rogers, 1995) and speech act schematics (Cooren, 2001; Searle, 1969). Fairhurst and Cooren contrast these three approaches, noting that each has a different analytic focus and is based on different theoretical assumptions. They also distinguish among them by applying each approach to analyse the same piece of text–a police radio transcript. The result is a rich and fascinating insight into the organizing properties of language. While noting that each makes an important and distinctive contribution to our understanding of organizational life and what constitutes 'organization', they are careful to explain that the aim of their chapter is not to suggest that any one approach is better than the others, but rather to explain and preserve the analytical integrity of each.

CONTEXT SENSITIVE APPROACHES Approaches that focus on language in use draw attention to the detailed aspects of discursive interaction. In certain instances this may have its merits, but it does leave these approaches open to accusations of having too narrow a focus and of not being sufficiently context sensitive (Segerdahl, 1998). For example, Iedema (2003, p. 38) has suggested that 'conversation analysis' concentration on the structural technical and interactive details of short stretches of talk excludes this kind of analysis from having much to say about broader social and organizational processes and outcomes'. Writers such as Heritage (1984) have sought to counter these criticisms by suggesting that anything that is contextual will manifest itself in the microsociological details of the discursive interaction under scrutiny, although this line of argument has not satisfied many researchers. Instead, they employ methodological approaches that take account of the historical and social factors that reside beyond the text under scrutiny, factors which are adjudged to influence and shape the way a text is produced, disseminated and consumed. Examples of these contextsensitive approaches include studies that draw on pragmatics, sociolinguistics, institutional dialogue, systemics and critical discourse analysis.

Like approaches that focus on language in use, pragmatics focuses on the words and grammar of language as emergent in discursive interactions. However, pragmatics draws heavily on the philosophy of language, particularly Grice's (1957, 1971) theories of meaning and intentional communication and Austin (1962) and Searle's (1969, 1979) work on speech-act theory. The result is an approach to the study of language that goes beyond conventional conversation analysis in that:

> Words can mean more–or something other–than what they say. Their interpretation depends on a multiplicity of factors including familiarity with the context, intonational cues and cultural assumptions. The same phrase may have different meanings on different occasions and the same intention may be expressed by different linguistic means. (Blum-Kulka, 1997, p. 38)

The context sensitive position, adopted by pragmatics offers interesting insights into, for example, crosscultural communication (Tannen, 1986). However, context sensitive studies of discourse in organizations have developed even further. Interactive sociolinguistics, for example, combines basic social variables such as age, class and gender with an understanding of the interpretive and assumptive frames of reference (Goffman, 1963) that people draw on when talking to one another and in their behaviour towards one another. Researchers such as Schiffrin (1994) have used this framework of analysis to demonstrate

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that people's cultural and social backgrounds are deeply implicated in the construction of social identity.

Social context in particular has also been brought to the fore in studies of dialogue and talk. For example, studies of institutional dialogue place an emphasis on how institutional context informs and shapes language and thus the way in which individuals perform and pursue their respective organizational tasks and goals (Drew & Sorjonen, 1997). As Drew and Heritage (1992) have observed, much of the institutional dialogue literature has tended to focus on the same, specific institutional settings that emanate from outside of organization theory (e.g., sociological studies of doctor-patient interactions [Fisher & Todd, 1983; Heath, 1986; Silverman, 1987]). More recently, however, organization theorists have started to focus on a variety of socially situated aspects of everyday talk, especially professional talk and dialogue, among organization members. This development has led to studies of the various forms of talk and dialogue (bargaining, argumentation, negotiation, generative dialogue, etc.) that appear in organizations and how they relate to the social construction of a reality that impacts on identity, roles and occupational constraints (e.g., Hamilton, 1997; Iedema et al, 2004; Putnam, 2004).

Systemic approaches to the study of organizational discourse, while still context sensitive, are also concerned with the political nature of language. Systemic approaches such as sociopolitical linguistics (Halliday, 1978, 1994) and critical linguistics attempt to 'expose the inequitable distribution of opportunities for meaning making to different groups in society' (Iedema, 2003, p. 41). These days, sociopolitical and critical linguistics are apt to be regarded as integral to social semiotics–an approach that is not only concerned with the political intricacies of discourse, but also with the multimodal features (language, gesture, dress, etc.) of meaning making (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1990). This approach draws on the work of Foucault, who sought to uncover the representionalist discourse or principles that govern a particular aspect of society (Foucault, 1965, 1973, 1974, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1986). As such, social semiotic approaches reveal the political effects of discourse on a variety of organizational phenomena such as knowledge, power, identity construction and the operation and effect of rules and procedures (Fowler & Kress, 1979; Hodge et al., 1979; Iedema, 2003; Martin, 1993; Rose, 1990).

Perhaps one of the most influential context sensitive approaches to the study of organizational discourse has been that of critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA aims to reveal the role of language as it relates to ideology, power and sociocultural change (Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Leeuwen, 1993). It combines several of the aforementioned methodological approaches to epitomize their complex, blurred and interpenetrating nature. It is based on a 'three dimensional' framework whereby any discursive event is analysed on the basis of its being 'simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice' (Fairclough, 1992, p. 4). More specifically, what occurs is (i) examination of the actual content, structure and meaning of the text under scrutiny *(the text dimension);* (ii) examination of the form of discursive interaction used to communicate meaning and beliefs *(the discursive practice dimension);* and (iii) consideration of the social context in which the discursive event is taking place *(the social practice dimension)*.

Like the systemic approaches of critical linguistics and social semiotics, CDA draws upon the theories and approaches of Bourdieu, Derrida, Lyotard and, in particular, Foucault, while at the same time utilizing systematic and detailed forms of textual analysis to be found in conversation analysis, studies of institutional dialogue and pragmatics. Crucially, it combines

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these forms of analysis with the concept of *intertextuality* (Bakhtin, 1986; Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Kress & Threadgold, 1988; Thibault, 1991). Intertextuality reminds us that while texts may be the discursive units on which the researcher focuses, discourse itself has an existence beyond any individual text from which it is constituted (Chalaby, 1996; Hardy, 2001; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Phillips et al., 2004). In short, any text is seen as 'a link in a chain of texts, reacting to, drawing in and transforming other texts' (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 262). The value of this approach is that it mediates the connection between language and social context, and facilitates more satisfactory bridging of the gap between texts and contexts (Fairclough, 1995, p. 189). Consequently, it takes us beyond simple examinations of verbal and written interaction and allows us to appreciate the importance of 'who uses language, how, why and when' (Van Dijk, 1997b, p. 2).

These features have made CDA and other intertextual approaches extremely attractive to organization theorists because they override representationist concerns that location cannot explain organization. Discourse analytic approaches that are intertextual thus suggest that to understand the constructive effects of discourse, researchers must contextualize discourses historically and socially. As Kress (cited in Hardy, 2001, p. 27) observes:

> Texts are the sites of the emergence of complexes of social meanings, produced in the particular history of the situation of production, that record in partial ways the histories of both the participants in the production of the text and of the institutions that are 'invoked' or brought into play, indeed a partial history of the language and the social system… (Kress, 1995, p. 122)

Four chapters in this *Handbook* demonstrate the significance of social and historical context, and the importance of intertextuality to studies of organizational discourse. In the first of these, Susan Ainsworth and Cynthia Hardy apply context sensitive approaches (CDA, systemics and sociolinguistics) to the same piece of data (text from a novel) in order to study identity in organizational settings. Ainsworth and Hardy's approach to identity is essentially social constructionist in nature. Their point–derived from Hacking (2000)–is that constructionist studies of identity tend to focus on the 'product' of identity construction rather than the processes by which it comes about. They demonstrate how, combined, the various forms of discourse analysis can address this deficiency by allowing organizational researchers to examine the complex processes that constitute the construction of identity. As such, their chapter represents an attempt to 'revitalize' constructionist research in this area.

Earlier we noted that the language in use approaches to the study of organizational discourse downplay context. Ainsworth and Hardy's study challenges this criticism. Not only does it show the value of context sensitive approaches to identity construction, it also shows that studies of language in use, notably conversation analysis, have an equally important role in investigating context. Language in use approaches can be used to demonstrate how rules and structures associated with particular discursive interactions constitute identities and how they lead to the institutionalization of these identities. Their chapter thus reminds us that while important, we should not necessarily seek to privilege context sensitive approaches over those that focus on language in use. Both have something to offer the study of identity (as well as other socially and organizationally related phenomena). Moreover, their respective benefits are most apparent when they are used in a complimentary fashion.

The issue of discursive context is a central feature of Loizos Heracleous's chapter. For Heracleous, an important and often neglected feature of organizational discourse is the way in which historical and social context shapes or constructs its interpretation. To him, a failure to

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link the interpretation of discourse to context and to appreciate how and why this occurs has two interrelated and important repercussions. First, it contributes to and perpetuates a number of common misconceptions about the ontological and epistemological status of interpretivism, including that it is an abstract theoretical approach and a form of subjectivism. In so doing, it undermines the validity of interpretive discourse approaches (hermeneutics, rhetoric, metaphor, symbolic interactionism and critical discourse analysis). Secondly, it constrains our ability to understand how organizational members engage with, and make sense of, particular discourses and their associated texts and then act and behave as they do. For Heracleous, an understanding of this misconception and an appreciation of the significance of interpretivism are critical for the organizational discourse project to make progress. Accordingly, his chapter demonstrates the empirical and analytical rigour of interpretive-based approaches to the study of discourse, showing how, within a social constructionist framework, they can generate new and alternative understandings of a range of important organizational phenomena.

Like Heracleous, Stan Deetz, Kirsten Broadfoot and Donald Anderson remind us that it is not only the text under scrutiny that shapes interpretation, but also the other texts that interpreters invariably bring to the process. Their chapter demonstrates that texts can be linked to other texts and that this process is ongoing and recursive as texts are produced, reviewed and changed. In this respect Deetz and his co-authors address the intertextual properties of discourse. Their point is that no one theoretical or methodological approach can capture these properties. Instead, they suggest that researchers adopt a multilevel perspective of the organization and multiple discourse analytic methods. They draw on three approaches to examine the relationship between discourse and organization and go on to show how multilevel analyses would work. In using these three approaches they are able to enlarge their empirical and analytical focus and embrace the social and historical dynamics of organizational discourses. They do not, however, suggest that any one of the approaches is more valuable than the others. Instead they believe that a combination is most useful. In sum, Deetz and his colleagues advance the case for organizational discourse as a plurivocal project. Only by drawing on a combination of the many approaches available can this field of study progress.

Craig Prichard, Deborah Jones and Ralph Stablein also believe that adopting a context sensitive approach to the study of organizational discourse is important. However, the context sensitive approach they advocate differs in emphasis and purpose from those discussed so far. Their aim is for organizational discourse researchers to develop a reflexive understanding of their own context. Using Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) five research choice points, they demonstrate a number of questions that researchers need to ask about their own roles and the milieu in which they operate. Answers to these queries allow researchers to reflect on what might be the most appropriate discursive analytic approach to adopt in relation to the organizational phenomenon they wish to study. Prichard and his colleagues provide a chapter that enriches organizational discourse research practice. It is an invaluable aid to those who are novices to organizational discourse analysis.

EXPOSITION OF PLURIVOCALITY Methodological choices, such as those discussed above, are related to epistemological perspectives and, in this regard, we subscribe to a particular view of the way in which discourse ‘does things’. Specifically, we believe that discourse does many things at the same time and over time, in many different arenas, and in ways that are not necessarily compatible or even visible. Thus, there can never be only one discourse that characterizes an organizational setting. Nor is there ever a definitive reading of organizational discourse. Researchers are only able to observe some of what is going on as a result of their

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methodological choices; and they promote particular readings of it depending on academic and professional considerations. Moreover, researchers are subjected to their own discursive orders that discipline what they see and think. Discourse is thus the site of a struggle that extends beyond organizational borders to encompass the academic project itself, and which is nested in multiple discourses. Accordingly, any particular research approach cannot but fail to capture the complexity of language use that occurs over time, in multiple sites, and in hidden ways: we make choices and tradeoffs, some of which we are not even aware of. In advocating plurivocality, we subscribe to an epistemology that acknowledges the limitations of what we think we know, and provides space for different approaches and readings of organizational phenomena.

Not all researchers of organizational discourse take this approach, however. For example, a number of studies of organizational discourse, which might be described as positivist in their approach, see organizations as 'containers' of discourse and discourse as only one variable among many worthy of study. According to this perspective, discourse is a facet of organizational life; a communicative practice that can be empirically examined to determine its meaning and purpose. This 'containerization' of discourse has led to positivist approaches being described as viewing discourse in functional terms (Putnam et al, 1996): 'as a body of communicative actions that [serve as] tools at actors' disposal, emphasising the purposive and instrumental use of such communicative actions for the facilitation of managerially relevant processes and outcomes' (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001, p. 756). Drawing on, for example, conversation and rhetorical analysis, positivist studies of organizational discourse have undoubtedly provided valuable insights into organizational practices, such as decision-making, conflict management and leadership (Huisman, 2001; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989; Yeung, 1997). They use empirically derived data to identify patterns and regularities within the discursive interactions of various organizational actors (e.g., Brown, 1985; Crouch & Basch, 1997; Donnellon, 1994; Palmer & Dunford, 1996; Tannen, 1995).

The value of positivist studies, however, has been questioned on several important dimensions. Specifically, positivist approaches to the study of organizational discourse do not seek to uncover the ways that language constitutes and reconstitutes social arrangements (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). They do not, for example, dwell on how discourse is used by different groups to further their respective interests. Nor do they look at how discourse produces and maintains systems of power and control or how it is used to resist such systems. In some cases, such as Huisman's (2001) conversation analytic study of decision-making, this work demonstrates a limited recognition of the importance of context. These limitations lead to a flat, somewhat one-dimensional view of discourse and suggest that although positivist studies add considerably to our knowledge of practices and processes or 'functions of management' (Oswick et al, 1997), they reinforce rather than challenge the boundaries and constraints of organizing and organization.

Another limitation of the positivist approach to studying organizational discourse is an emphasis on a monological orientation (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1993; Grant et al., 1998b; Oswick, 2001) that presents a singular, coherent narrative or set of shared meanings among organizational members (Boje, 1995). Mumby and Clair term this a 'cultural/interpretative' approach which:

> tends to operate at a largely descriptive level, and focuses on the ways in which organization members' discursive practices contribute to the development of shared meaning. As such, the principal goal of this research is to demonstrate the connection between the shared norms and values of an organization on the one

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> hand, and the means by which these norms and values are expressed on the other. (Mumby & Clair, 1997, pp. 182–3)

Perhaps the strongest condemnation of monological accounts of the organization comes from those who question the validity of such studies and the selective reading of data that leads to a reified, rhetorical analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). They suggest that this can be avoided by utilizing the more dialogical (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1993) or polyphonic forms of analysis, to which we now turn.

In this regard, studies of organizational discourse that take a critical perspective expose the ways in which discourse constitutes and reconstitutes social arrangements in organizational settings. They emphasize how discourse is used to produce, maintain or resist power, control and inequality though ideology and hegemony (Mumby & Clair, 1997), and show discourse itself to be a power resource. More specifically, critical discourse studies see organizations as dialogical entities where discourses vie with each other for dominance (Oswick, 2001). They regard organizations as 'sites of struggle in which different groups compete to shape the social reality of organizations in ways that serve their own interests' (Mumby & Clair, 1997, p. 182) and in ways that enable them to exercise or resist social control. This, in turn, enables these studies to demonstrate how inequalities in power determine the ability to control the production, distribution and consumption of particular discourses (Clegg, 1975; Deetz, 1995; Giddens, 1979; Mumby & Stohl, 1991; Rosen, 1985). As Fairclough (1995, p. 2) explains, the 'power to control discourse is seen as the power to sustain particular discursive practices with particular ideological investments in dominance over other alternative (including oppositional) practices'.

The value of critical discourse studies, then, is that they explore how and why some organizational meanings become privileged, taken for granted and reified (Hardy, 2001). Similarly, they explain why power relations that appear fixed within organizations (Clegg, 1989) are really the result of ongoing discursive struggles in which any shared meaning is secured via a process of negotiation (Mumby & Stohl, 1991). Furthermore, they demonstrate that although some discourses may dominate, 'their dominance is secured as part of an ongoing struggle among competing discourses that are continually reproduced or transformed through day-to-day communicative practices' (Hardy, 2001, p. 28).

Critical organizational discourse studies draw on the work of a variety of social theorists such as Foucault (1978), Bourdieu (1991) and Giddens (1984) to reveal the political effects of discourse in relation to a variety of organizational phenomena. Moreover, they take an intertextual approach that is sensitive to historical and social context to explore how and why particular interests shape and are shaped by discourses that come to dominate (see above). Such studies utilize a variety of methodological approaches, including critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics and critical linguistics. For example, focusing on the links between language and power, Fairclough has applied CDA to a variety of sociocultural changes and trends as well as social and organizational discursive phenomena (Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Others, such as Wodak and her colleagues, examine the effects of power structures and ideologies on individuals' organizational performances through a methodological approach consistent with sociolinguistics (Hein & Wodak, 1987; Muntigl et al, 1999; Wodak, 1996; Wodak & Matoushek, 1993).

Dennis Mumby's chapter contends that the critical perspective offers a highly effective means by which to understand how discourse constitutes and is constituted by social practices. In a detailed exposition of the links between discourse, power and ideology, he shows how

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discourse brings oppression and domination into existence and how these objects become material realities through the practices that they invoke. Mumby's argument is that discursive studies incorporating this perspective can unpack the complex power-related dimensions that permeate the construction of knowledge that fosters gendered and race-based identities within organizations. His chapter thus demonstrates how critical modes of engagement with organizational discourse influence 'the conditions that shape what may be said, who can speak within socially organized settings, the ways in which reality claims are made and the social practices that are invoked' (Hardy, 2001, p. 28). In this respect, critical discourse studies offer a rich insight into organizational processes and practices, one that is richer than findings drawn from positivist research.

Critical studies, however, have been criticized as being limited in their explanatory power. From a dialogical perspective, they assume that the organization is essentially a site of bivocal competition–a place where two competing discourses are in operation. These two discourses represent the forces of undue power and human emancipation (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 34). Thus, while discursive studies of organizations tend to adopt a normative perspective of social relations in organizations, their ability to offer innovative insights into the complexities, paradoxes and contradictions that often characterize contemporary organizations is restricted. Postmodern modes of engagement overcome this problem by depicting the organization as a polyphonic (Oswick, 2001) entity that comprises paradoxical, fluid and contradictory processes. This perspective avoids reification of the concept 'organization', while offering a more complete explanation of the incoherence and inconsistency that underlies what organizations do to cope with the escalating demands of globalization and the increasing unpredictability of 'the market' (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

As with the critical perspective, postmodern approaches focus on the role of discourse in meaning construction and social relations within the organization, and hence adopt a social constructionist view. They are also highly intertextual in that they recognize the importance of the social and historical dynamics of discourse (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b; Boje, 1995, 2001; Burrell, 1996; Chia, 1998, 2000; Cooper, 1993; Keenoy et al, 1997; Parker, 2000). However, the postmodern perspective of organizational discourse challenges its critical and positivist counterparts in a number of significant respects. As Iedema (2003, p. 23) points out, postmodernism has acted as a rallying point for organization theorists who are becoming increasingly sceptical about the systematic and stable features of organization and who want to move beyond the patterns and regularities of conventional organizational theory. It does not commence with the premise that there is some preexisting social object called 'organization', which is defined by its formal features and cohesive behaviours (Alvesson, 1995; Alvesson & Deetz, 1996; Chia, 1996; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Gergen, 1992; Hassard, 1994; Kilduff & Mehra, 1997; Knights, 1997). Rather, it views the texts that constitute discourse as metaphors for organizing and as representing an array of multiple meanings. Consequently, they require careful deconstruction (Derrida, 1976) in order to reveal the concealed and marginalized elements within them and thereby open them up for alternative interpretations (Calás & Smircich, 1999; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). Studies adopting this approach examine the texts represented in a variety of discursive domains, including dialogue and conversation (Cissna & Anderson, 1998; Cooren, 1997, 1999, 2001; Cooren & Taylor, 1997, 1998; Eisenberg & Goodall, 1993; Groleau & Cooren, 1998; Isaacs, 1993, 1999; Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2000; Taylor & Van Every, 2000) and narratives and stories (Boje, 1995, 2001; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1996; Gabriel, 1991, 1995, 1997, 1998).

The deconstruction of texts is the focus of Martin Kilduff and Mihaela Keleman's chapter. For them, the rise in organizational discourse studies is to be welcomed because it signals

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renewed appreciation of the importance of language and other symbolic media in understanding the social construction of organizations. However, although there has been a rise in the number of postmodern discourse studies, these often overlook the value of deconstruction in explicating the meanings of a given text. All too often, they argue, scholars apply discourse analytical approaches in ways that send them down predetermined paths towards self-evident meanings. The value of deconstruction, they argue, is that it enables the reader to examine the complexities of the text itself, does not prescribe any particular meaning to it and points out over simplification on the part of previous non-deconstructive readings. To demonstrate these attributes, they deconstruct a classic organizational text, Chester Barnard's *The Functions of the Executive*, finding that this work should not be treated as a celebration of rationality, formal power structures and cooperation, but rather as a eulogy to the behaviour of the individual in the organization and his or her inherent need for camaraderie.

Postmodern studies acknowledge explicitly that the organization is a polyphonic entity comprising a multiplicity of discourses that reflect meanings of various participants (Grant et al, 1998b), and which result in fragmented, ambiguous and paradoxical meanings (Martin, 1992; Meyerson, 1991; Thatchenkery & Upadhaya, 1996). In so doing, they suggest that the organization is in fact an abstract notion that often fails to resonate with its members' lived reality. In this way, postmodernist studies of organizational discourse add a new dimension to what constitutes organization and organizing. Specifically, they suggest that what are often viewed as abstract principles underlie our shared understandings and experiences of organizations and that discourse inevitably plays an important role in both the social construction and deployment of these principles.

Taking a polyphonic approach to organizational discourse also leads postmodern studies to suggest that organizations are comprised of a multitude of 'organizational realities' which, although expressed in relatively autonomous discourses, may overlap and permeate each other. Accordingly, scholars can identify and analyse the many discourses and counter-discourses that actors use to make sense of their work, their colleagues and the organization. These assumptions permeate other epistemological positions and so, while the *Handbook* contains two separate chapters on the critical and postmodern perspectives, these boundaries blur as writers draw on and combine insights from both perspectives, as can be seen in, for example, the chapters on power, culture and globalization.

Discourses and Organizing

Parts I and II of the *Handbook*, in combination, represent studies that address the theoretical and conceptual features of organizational discourse and examine the methodological and epistemological perspectives that inform discourse analyses. The chapters in Part III focus on the discourses of organizing; that is, they use discourse analytic techniques as a 'vehicle' to scrutinize and analyse specific organizational phenomena (see Table 1). In so doing, they show how organizational discourses bring objects such as identity, knowledge and power relations (Alvesson, 1996; Du Gay & Salaman, 1992; Hardy et al., 1998, Phillips & Hardy, 1997) into existence and how they are manifested in organizational practices. Similarly, they show how studies have illuminated our understandings of organizational strategy (Knights & Morgan, 1991); negotiation processes (Putnam, 2004); decision-making (Huisman, 2001); interorganizational collaboration (Hardy et al., 1998); organizational change (Mueller et al, 2004); and workplace control (Knights & Wilmott, 1989). The chapters in Part III of this *Handbook* exemplify this approach, providing fresh insights into a variety of specific, organizationally related issues.

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Karen Ashcraft's chapter examines the contribution of the discursive turn to the study of gender in organizations. Ashcraft notes how discourse constitutes rather than simply reflects–gendered identity in organizational settings. She contends that this view highlights the ways in which discursive activity creates, solidifies, disrupts and alters gender identities. The discursive literature on gender, however, has given rise to a diversity of views that Ashcraft finds both useful and encumbering. Her chapter seeks to sensitize the researcher to this fact by identifying four dominant ways of framing the relationships among discourse, gender and organization. It does not, however, identify any one of these as the 'optimal' perspective, but instead clarifies points of agreement and tensions among them. Ashcraft concludes by calling for researchers to move from one frame of reference to another, suggesting that this process of interplay will evoke new ways of seeing.

Many studies of organizational discourse, particularly those that adopt a critical perspective, suggest that the social construction of discourse emerges from the power laden contexts in which meanings are negotiated. Cynthia Hardy and Nelson Phillip's chapter reminds us that power and discourse are mutually constitutive. In short, discourse shapes power relations and power relations shape which actors are able to influence discourse. Hardy and Phillips propose a framework that offers a useful alternative to mainstream approaches to the study of power and politics in organizations. This framework melds the extant power literature and the work of Foucault and critical discourse analysts with the way that discourse shapes power. The resultant framework is essentially intertextual and highly sensitive to both temporal and spatial contexts. It enables the researcher to explain why some actors, as opposed to others, are better able to produce and modify texts that influence discourse in ways beneficial to these actors. It also demonstrates how power relations come about over a period of time and why they, and the discourses they invoke, change.

For Mats Alvesson, studies of organizational culture often downplay the importance of discourse and, instead, focus on shared, moderately stable forms of meaning that are only partially verbalized. Culture focuses on systems of meanings and symbolism that become taken for granted, and thus need to be deciphered. Myths, basic assumptions about human nature and perceptions of the organizational environment are often 'language-distant', that is, they are rarely espoused and form part of the sub-conscious. Conversely, discursive studies of culture look at language in use and view the meanings attached to culture as discursively constituted. This approach leads to identification of culture-related discourses and their effects on the organization. Alvesson uses his chapter to preserve the integrity of both the cultural and discursive approaches to the study of organizations, believing that both provide valuable insights into the phenomenon. Thus, he advocates an approach to culture that is sensitive to, but not solely focused on, the importance of language. He argues that preserving and applying this distinction will yield rich analytical insights.

Christian Heath, Paul Luff and Hubert Knoblauch's chapter synthesizes a body of research known as 'workplace studies'. These studies focus on a range of tools and technologies that are present in our day-to-day working lives. More specifically, they utilize discourse analytic methods to explore how these artefacts have become taken for granted in workplaces while simultaneously demonstrating that their use rests upon social and organizational interactions. For Heath and his colleagues, conventional studies of organizational discourse downplay the material aspects of an organization and the way these aspects affect language and talk at work. Thus, they demonstrate how language in use affects the tools and technology in the workplace. With workplace studies, the opposite holds true; using examples from a doctor-patient consultation and a television newsroom, they show how tools and technologies create

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socially enacted rules that impact on the form, content and meaning of discursive interactions. This relationship, argue Heath and his colleagues, provides an innovative, distinct and detailed analytical approach to the study of work and how it is accomplished.

Like Heath and his colleagues, Pablo Boczkowski and Wanda Orlikowski also focus on workplace technology and how it impacts on the accomplishment of work. Their chapter, however, examines research on new technology and the new media. New media refers to information, telecommunication and communication technologies, for example, electronic mail, videoconferencing, instant messaging and voice mail. For Boczkowski and Orlikowski, the communication literature continues to distinguish between face-to-face and mediated communication, despite the widespread integration of communication media. What is important, however, is whether the users of new media believe it to be synchronous–that is, whether they see it as a form of communication that allows for immediacy of interaction, direct connection to others and control over the pace and timing of the conversation. To examine the extent to which synchrony occurs, they develop an innovative framework–one in which the discourses of the new media users are analysed in conjunction with their actual practices. Boczkowski and Orlikowski argue that such an approach provides important insights into the dynamic, emergent nature of organizational discourse and how new media and its synchrony impacts these processes.

The final chapter in this section examines globalization as it impacts on the process of organizing. For Norman Fairclough and Pete Thomas an appreciation of how certain versions of the term ‘globalization’ have come to dominate our thinking about organizations is achieved by adopting a dialectical approach to the issue. This involves their drawing a distinction between what they call the ‘discourse of globalization’ and the ‘globalization of discourse’. Discourses of globalization refer to texts about globalization. They crystallize globalization as a distinct social practice, and often present it as a reified object that emanates from an ongoing and inevitable flow. Fairclough and Thomas suggest that these discursive representations are resources developed by particular social agents to achieve particular social ends. Moreover, they reinforce the process of globalization in ways that these actors did not intend or anticipate. The globalization of discourse refers to the emergence of organizational discourses as global in reach and penetration. This process occurs, first, when the discourse of globalization is recontextualized into one that assimilates local preexisting discourses and, second, when globalization is translated into moments of social action that change belief systems or social structures within and around organizations. The processes that Fairclough and Thomas identify as crucial to globalization are likely to apply to other social phenomena and how they impact on organizations. However, these processes are not only conceptually important, they are also politically significant in demonstrating how powerful, hegemonic discourses promote oppression and inequality. Fairclough and Thomas end on an optimistic note by pointing out that their chapter demonstrates the frailties, weaknesses and contradictions that occur within these processes. These contradictions can be exploited for resistance and the development of counter-emancipatory discourses.

In providing the above categorization for the chapters of the *Handbook* which, in turn, influences, and is influenced by, the chapters themselves as well as our own views of organizational discourse, we need to make two disclaimers. First, we have noted the plurivocal nature of the studies of organizational discourse in this *Handbook*. In this regard, we admit to privileging plurivocality as a feature of work on organizational discourse that we value highly. We offer no apologies for this, other than to say that a number of other researchers clearly agree that this is a useful way for the field to develop. We also acknowledge that, in setting up categories of disciplinary antecedents and epistemological

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positions, we inevitably reify 'false' distinctions. We do so for analytic purposes and concede that the various domains, methods and perspectives complement one another, and any apparent divisions among them should be regarded as blurred or interpenetrating. Accordingly, we do not see this categorization as a way in which particular authors or studies can be neatly pigeonholed or mapped on to a grid. Rather, it allows us to identify the key philosophical, theoretical, epistemological and methodological tenets of organizational discourse research and to provide greater understanding of the complex nature of the relationship between organizational discourse and the study of organizations.

Organizational Discourse: Key Issues and Debates

Several key issues and debates regarding organizational discourse surface in this *Handbook*. These pertain to the negotiation of meaning, intertextuality, cognitive approaches to organizational discourse, and reflexivity. These issues and debates are significant in assessing the contributions of organizational discourse to the study of organizations. They also set direction for future research in the field.

The Negotiation of Meaning

Collectively, the chapters in this *Handbook* contribute to the growing body of literature through examining how meaning is negotiated in organizations and how these struggles impact on organizing. Each chapter in its own way demonstrates how struggles around meaning are played out in organizations. Further, each one reminds us that organizations do not start out 'possessing' meaning; instead, meanings are created and contested through discursive interactions among organizational actors and organizational publics with divergent interests (Mumby & Clair, 1997). The emergence of dominant meanings arises as alternative discourses are subverted or marginalized. In highlighting this process, a number of *Handbook* chapters also demonstrate that the negotiation of meaning is influenced by discursive context and, more specifically, intertextuality. This brings us to our next point.

The Significance of Intertextuality

Our discussion of context sensitive approaches to discourse, along with several of the chapters in the *Handbook* (e.g., Heracleous, Deetz et al, Fairclough & Thomas), demonstrates that the negotiation of meaning unfolds through the complex interplay of both socially and historically produced texts (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a; Keenoy & Oswick, 2004) that are part of a continuous, iterative and recursive process (Grant & Hardy, 2004; Taylor et al, 1996). This process means that the outcome of such negotiations are what produce 'organization', and that in so doing they also produce the context in which the discourse is embedded and from which new discourses emerge–what Iedema and Wodak (1999) have described as 'recontextualization'. Thus, when studying a particular discursive interaction, organizational researchers should consider other interactions that operate in different arenas and at different times, and which are linked to and inform interpretations of the discourse under scrutiny. As pointed out by Deetz and his co-authors in their chapter, this aspect of organizational discourse analysis remains under-theorized in two significant respects.

First, historical context imposes temporal constraints on intertextual studies in that a text that was produced in the past can only be linked to a text in the present (Keenoy & Oswick, 2004). It does not acknowledge that what is said in the past or present has a significant impact on what is said in the *future*. Keenoy and Oswick observe that only a handful of studies focus on

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the projective content of a discourse, that is, its implications, outcomes and aims. These studies include Pearce and Cronen's (1979) work on the way that social actors assess the potentially negative and positive consequences of their discursive actions for themselves and for others and act accordingly.

Secondly, Keenoy and Oswick (2004) also point out that intertextual approaches often focus only on context as a 'backdrop' to the discursive episode under scrutiny when what is actually needed is to see context as *embedded* within the episode itself, that is, 'the text actually forms part of the context and vice versa'. Similarly, Latour (2000) has argued that the micro and macro levels of discourse are in many ways indivisible, while Cooren (2001) has shown how micro-level utterances are mutually implicated with discourses on macro-level organizing. Drawing on the work of Adam (1998) and Schama (1995), Keenoy and Oswick conclude that organizational discourse researchers need to analyse what they call the 'textscape' of a discursive event in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of its meaning. To achieve this, more studies need to assess simultaneously *both* the temporal and social dynamics of organizational discourse. In doing so they must recognize that the dynamics are blurred and interpenetrating and be appreciative of the fact that they are embedded in the text of the discursive event itself, rather than just surrounding or being linked to it.

Cognitive Approaches and the Study of Organizational Discourse

Cognitive approaches such as those advocated by cognitive linguists (Brown, 1970; Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987) and cognitive psychologists (Graesser et al., 1997) have sought to map cognitive frameworks on to the study of discourse. Although they differ in emphasis, they nevertheless share a common interest in how the mind processes and constructs discourse (Forrester, 1996, pp. 5–7; Greene, 1986). This concern sets them apart from the methodological approaches discussed earlier in this chapter. Specifically, cognitive approaches show that a variety of verbal, written or symbolic forms of discourse evoke mental processes such as scripts, schemata and frames that are rooted in mental maps of cultural, social and organizational experiences (Lord & Kernan, 1987; Moch & Fields, 1985).

Within organizational studies, cognitive approaches fall into the broad category of sense-making (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). Studies adopting the cognitive approach show how the discursively constructed meanings that reside in our minds impact on collective sense-making and thus on the processes of organizing (Gioia, 1986; Weick, 1995). In so doing, these studies have looked at the impact of cognitive scripts and schema on such activities as performance appraisals (Gioia et al, 1989), negotiations and bargaining (Carroll & Payne, 1991; O'Connor & Adams, 1999) and superior-subordinate relationships (Gioia & Sims, 1983).

Despite this work, cognitive approaches to the study of organizational discourse are relatively underdeveloped. The organizational discourse literature exhibits a tendency to shy away from the cognitive aspects of words and their meanings in organizations. Indeed, the *Handbook* itself reflects this fact. No chapter is solely devoted to this issue and only a few integrate cognitive aspects of discourse into their analyses (see, e.g., Heracleous or Deetz et al.).

Marshak and colleagues (Marshak et al, 2000, pp. 250–1) suggest that this paucity of cognitive material stems from the infancy of organizational discourse studies and the dominance of researchers with organizational sociology rather than psychology backgrounds. They also suggest that many organizational discourse scholars feel more comfortable with conventional perspectives of language found in sociolinguistics and, more recently, the 'postmodern turn'. Consequently, the key metaphors and analogues they employ

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conceptualize organizational phenomena as ‘narratives’, ‘texts’, ‘conversations’ or ‘discourses’ and the methodological approaches adopted focus on discerning the social meaning(s) of discourse as opposed to individual motivations and the psychological origins of words. This dearth of cognitive research leads us to reiterate Marshak et al.'s (2000) call for more studies of organizational discourse that examine the psychosocial origins of organizational texts, narratives and meanings, which lie beneath the subtext of social interaction.

Reflexivity

As the chapters in this *Handbook* contribute to unpacking how organizational meanings are negotiated, it is important to acknowledge that we, as editors, are clearly negotiating meaning for organizational discourse. This interpretation of reflexivity is well embedded within the discourse of organizational discourse (e.g., Chia, 2000; Iedema, 2003; Keenoy et al., 2000b). As Alvesson and Kärreman (2000b, p. 145) have observed, organizational discourse provides researchers with the opportunity to reflect on the ambiguous and constructed nature of the data with which they must work, while at the same time allowing them space for bold ways of interacting with the material. We have directly addressed the issue of reflexivity in other writings (Grant & Hardy, 2004). Here, we adopt a different approach: we commissioned three eminent scholars to review the *Handbook's* contents and to comment on the strength and limitations of this volume in contributing to our understanding of organization. Their reflections comprise the final section of the *Handbook* and represent an important contribution.

Barbara Czarniawska's contribution focuses on the benefits arising from an upsurge of interest in the discursive analysis of organizations and organizing. In doing so she highlights that the ‘discursive turn’ has been helpful in so far as it diverts attention away from the overly mechanical view of information transfer prevalent in traditional models of communication (i.e., those which emphasize issues around the sender, receiver, message, noise and feedback). Drawing upon the work of Paul Ricœur, Czarniawska provides an account of speaking and writing as separated discursive forms through the deployment of the concept of ‘distanciation’ (the processes by which text acquires a distance from speech). She goes on to assert that treating text *as* action and action *as* text is crucial within the field of organization studies.

Karl Weick's reflection on acting discursively in organizations also highlights the relationship between text and action. Referring to the image of smoke, Weick encourages researchers to focus on the dynamic, transient smoke-like character of evolving conversations. These images capture the interface among saying, doing, seeing and enacting that unites a lived world with a text world. Weick points out that the term ‘discourse analysis’ may convey a more static picture of discourse than researchers intended. He cautions theorists to avoid the trap of treating discourse as self-contained or de-contextualized and, instead, to see it as becoming, embedded in context, known in aftermath, and within flux.

The final reflection injects a cautionary note for those taken with organizational discourse as Mike Reed attempts to bring a sense of realism back into its study. He thus uses his reflections chapter as an opportunity to put forward a critical realist perspective of organizational discourse. To Reed there is a worrying propensity among those who research in the field to reduce social constructionism to being a purely discursively determined process. He asserts that this raises a number of crucial questions about the inherent explanatory aspirations and limits of discourse analysis within organization studies which cannot be ignored. Reed seeks to develop an alternative and more meaningful approach to organizational discourse analysis, one which by virtue of adopting a critical realist perspective recognizes that ‘organization’ comes about primarily as a result of non-discursive interactions

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between particular agents and the various structural conditions and contingencies that determine conditions of action. This is not, however, to deny a role to discourse where it is seen as a representational or performative practice that is located within and reproduced through generative mechanisms or structures. For Reed, the advantage of such an approach is that it more clearly demonstrates the ways in which, for example, organizational discourse reshapes ongoing struggles for power and reinforces institutionalized power structures. At the same time it is an approach based on the premise that discourse isn't everything!

Conclusion

In this introduction we have sought to explore the field of organizational discourse and, in doing so, to provide an overview that captures its value and purpose as well as its plurivocal nature. The chapter has shown that the field encompasses a number of domains of study and variety of methodological approaches and epistemological perspectives that enable researchers to investigate a range of organizational phenomena. These attributes often delimit the parameters of a particular research question and facilitate analysis of an enormous range of data types (Grant et al., 2001; Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

Organizational discourse has made several important contributions to our understanding of organization. Most notably, it has shown how discourse is central to the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Searle, 1995) and, more specifically, and as part of this process, the negotiation of meaning. As such, discourse ‘acts as a powerful ordering force in organizations’ (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b, p. 1127). Discourse analytic approaches therefore allow the researcher to identify and analyse the key organizational discourses by which ideas are formulated and articulated and to show how, via a variety of discursive interactions and practices, these go on to shape and influence the attitudes and behaviour of an organization's members. Many of the chapters in this volume exemplify this attribute. They have, for example, illuminated an understanding of globalization, technology, identity, power and culture.

Yet despite the contributions to our understanding of organizations that studies of organizational discourse have so far made, there remains the sense that its considerable potential remains relatively underutilized–a point made all the more significant when we consider that most of the activity in organizations (i.e., organizing and managing) is primarily discursive. In this regard, the study of discourse in organizations is in many ways analogous to the notion of ‘oceans on earth’. Both organizational discourse and the oceans form the largest part of the macro phenomena in which they are embedded but they remain the least explored, least understood and most underutilized parts. More studies of organizational discourse are needed, studies that are undertaken from a variety of methodological and epistemological perspectives and which take into account its intertextual and cognitive features. We believe that for this to occur we need to integrate the insights of organizational discourse into organizational research even more broadly than has already been the case. There remains enormous scope to explore how discourse analysis relates to other theories that are familiar to organizational scholars, such as institutional theory, sense-making and actor-network theory, as well as drawing on work on discourse analytic approaches that has been undertaken in fields like psychology, sociology and political science. This is not to deny that some organizational researchers are already incorporating a wider frame of reference for their work; rather it is to encourage others to join those (e.g., Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a, 2000b; Burrell, 1997; Chia, 2000; Cooper, 1993; Deetz, 1992, 1995; Gergen, 1994, 1999; Keenoy et al, 1997; Kilduff, 1993; Knights, 1997; Parker, 2000; Reed, 2000; Tsoukas, 2000) who link discourse to broader social theory in order to provide

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new explanations and understanding of organizational structures and processes.

Notes

1. This project was carried out under the auspices of The International Centre for Research in Organizational Discourse, Strategy and Change and with the financial support of the Universities of Melbourne and Sydney.

2. The International Centre for Research in Organizational Discourse, Strategy and Change comprises eight institutional partners: the University of Melbourne, Australia; the University of Sydney, Australia; the University of Leicester, UK; Texas A&M University, USA; The Judge Institute of Management, University of Cambridge, UK; Lund University, Sweden; McGill University, Canada; and King's College, London, UK. It provides a critical mass of expertise in organizational discourse and offers an innovative approach to the study of strategy and change in organizations.

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