

Discursive Psychology

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The general term *discourse analysis* (DA) covers a range of somewhat related but mostly contrasting kinds of work. It is sometimes proposed as a general methodology (Wood & Kroger, 2000), and sometimes as theory and critique allied to social constructionism (Gergen, 1994; Harré & Gillett, 1994; Potter, 1996) or to the critique of social power and oppression (Fairclough, 1992; Parker, 1992; Wodak, 1998). One major difference between the various types of DA is in their methods of analysis. Some discourse analysts are linguists, or applied linguists, where textual materials (often written texts rather than spoken interaction) are analyzed in terms of their grammatical structures (Stubbs, 1983). Others draw mainly on conversation analysis (CA), where transcribed recordings of everyday talk are analyzed in terms of the social actions performed in each successive turn. Still other kinds of DA rely on no particular procedure of detailed analysis, but rather, look for patterns of language use that can be related to broader themes of social structure and ideological critique (Parker). Some DA mixes one or more of these approaches; for example, one kind of critical discourse analysis (CDA) combines linguistic analysis and ideological critique (Fairclough; Kress & Hodge, 1979) and another combines those elements with the construction of cognitive models of how people think (van Dijk, 1998).

The DA that is rooted in linguistics began as an effort to develop ways of analyzing grammatical structures that go beyond the boundaries of individual sentences in order to deal with larger texts, including naturally occurring ones, and conversational data. Most of linguistics uses invented (rather than recorded or collected) sentences as the basic object of analysis. Items such as Chomsky's famously ambiguous "Flying planes can be dangerous," for example, are assigned two different structural descriptions that account for their ambiguity. In contrast, linguistic DA is concerned with the kinds of

cohesion devices, such as pronouns and ellipsis (curtailed sentences), that connect larger stretches of text, and also with what the linguist Michael Halliday (1985) calls “transitivity.” Transitivity includes the basic grammatical categories through which language describes the world in terms of agency and action, a world in which events happen, and where agents (persons, organizations, etc.) perform actions on objects. Devices of interest include, for example, the use of passive forms (“twelve rioters were shot”) and nominalizations (“a shooting”), the use of which enables a speaker/writer to obscure, downplay, or omit mention of agency—whoever did the shooting.

Through the identification of transitivity and cohesion devices in texts such as newspaper reports (Fowler, 1991), linguistic CDA tries to make links between the detail of texts and the operation of power, ideology, and persuasion, these being conceived in a loosely Marxist framework. Links between larger social structures and the details of talk are not always convincingly spelled out, and interpretative commentaries tend to take a preferred version of what actually happened, as the basis for seeing how it is transformed in texts. Furthermore, CDA has not concerned itself much with the analysis of everyday social interactions, which is where CA is particularly strong, and which is the main focus of this chapter and of this volume.

Other kinds of DA, which are interested in the workings of ideology and social power, take their inspiration from Michel Foucault’s philosophical and historical analyses of discourse and ideology. For example, Wendy Hollway, Valerie Walkerdine, and others (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine 1984; Hollway, 1989) have taken key notions from Foucault, such as the creation of various forms of subjectivity (ways of understanding and experiencing the world, of accounting for it, and being positioned in it). Subjectivities are created in and through the historical growth of institutions such as medicine, prisons, psychiatry, academic psychology, and social science and their associated discourses. Foucault equates knowledge with power (Foucault, 1980; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; see also McHoul & Grace, 1993), paving the way for social critiques of how taken for granted power relationships, including gender relations and racism, are realized through discourse. Further attempts have been made, though often with little direct concern for Foucault’s writings, to develop the notion of subject positions for analyzing everyday talk (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Overall, Foucault’s influence on DA remains inspirational for discourse-based critiques of power and inequality, but there is no clearly formulated Foucaultian method for analyzing talk and texts. The plural term discourses says much about the concerns of this kind of analysis, where large, interconnected systems of concepts and social arrangements are being identified, rather any close attention paid to the workings of social interaction.

This chapter outlines and illustrates the theoretical and empirical basis of a development out of DA called *discursive psychology* (DP). In DP, discourse is taken to be talk and text of any kind, but the focus is mainly on the kinds of naturally occurring interactional talk (see Potter, 1997) through which people live their lives and conduct their everyday business. We can define DP briefly, to begin with, as the application of principles and methods from discourse and conversation analysis, and increasingly CA, to psychological themes. That definition will be elaborated later, but we begin by putting DP in the context of its own historical development.

A BRIEF HISTORY

It is a challenging discourse practice in its own right to produce a history of something one has been helping to develop. It has the features of a narrative account, partly autobiographical. It invites analysis of how it constructs and attends to its own accountability and good sense, occupying a special and important niche, and how it can be seen as a kind of progress, having emerged from a scholarly, critical appreciation of precursors and alternatives. This contextualizing is essentially post hoc, written as an explanation to readers of handbooks and encyclopaedias, of where it fits into the literature. With such discourse-relevant caveats in place, we can consider what DP is, in relation to DA in general.

One motive for inventing the term DP (Edwards & Potter, 1992) was to define something more specific within the broad collection of kinds of DA, and at the same time to promote DA as something more than just method. Nevertheless, it soon became apparent that a variety of kinds of work, not always closely related, had also started to be called DP (Harré & Stearns, 1995) and are sometimes confusingly glossed together (e.g., Coulter, 1999). Such is the nature of language and discourse practices, where contrasts, categories, and alignments are drawn and broken through the choice of descriptions. But let us note that DP emerged from a particular kind of DA.

In their seminal text *Discourse and Social Psychology*, Potter and Wetherell (1987) applied to social psychology a form of DA derived mainly from social studies of science (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984) and influenced by CA and ethnomethodology (Heritage, 1984, makes useful links). A major theme was the problem of how to analyze interview data. The traditional use of interviews was as a source of information about the interview's topic and what respondents thought and felt about it. The fact that respondents might produce inconsistent, variable versions and accounts had hitherto been treated as a kind of noise to be avoided or behind which to find the signal—that is, the consistent facts or attitudes supposedly being expressed. DA developed as a radical alternative to that approach. It focused on the so-called noise, the variability, and found there a different kind of order. What looked like cognitive inconsistency and unreliability became coherent when interview responses were left in the contexts of their occurrence and examined functionally and indexically. People were doing things with their talk: handling interactional contingencies, arguing particular points, drawing contrasts. They were, in a variety of ways, tailoring their talk's content to specific rhetorical uses and alternatives (cf. Billig, 1987). Several current forms of DA are associated with this work, though they have other, independent roots too. There is Billig's (1987) influential rhetorical social psychology; there is the analysis of ideologically rooted interpretative repertoires (Lawes, 1999; Wetherell & Potter, 1992); and there is DP itself, mainly represented here by the writings of Edwards and Potter (e.g., 1992, 2001; Edwards, 1997a; Potter, 1996).

There are three major strands in DP. These are: (i) respecification and critique of psychological topics and explanations; (ii) investigations of how everyday psychological categories are used in discourse; (iii) studies of how psychological business (motives and intentions, prejudices, reliability of memory and perception, etc.) is handled and managed in talk and text, without having to be overtly labeled as such. Our use of the term *psychological* across this range of topics is merely a convenient starting point. We

are not endorsing a treatment of these matters as rooted in psychological processes and explanations, and in fact the main thrust of DP is to avoid psychological theorizing in favor of analysis based in the pragmatics of social actions. The three strands are separated here also for convenience, and to forestall any perception of DP as basically a critique of psychology or as being concerned solely with the use of words such as “angry” and “remember.” There is more to it than that. Together, the strands add up to a very wide range of relevance for DP in the study of discourse and interaction across all kinds of settings. All three tend to be relevant in actual studies, but we will stay with them as a device for organizing this chapter and for collecting examples from a range of research studies to show how DP works.

RESPECIFICATION AND CRITIQUE

DP has developed a discourse-based alternative to topics that, in mainstream psychology and social psychology, are usually approached as cognitive representations explored through experimentation, the use of specially invented textual materials, and the construction of abstract cognitive models. Respecification¹ involves reworking psychological topics as discourse practices. Examples include memory and causal attribution, approached discursively through studies of everyday event reporting (Edwards & Potter, 1992, 1993; Middleton & Edwards, 1990). Attitude measurement becomes the study of evaluative practices in discourse (Potter, 1998a; Potter & Wetherell, 1988; cf. Billig, 1989). The role of emotions in actions and relationships is studied through how people invoke emotional states in personal narratives, such as in counseling or relationship disputes (Edwards, 1997a, 1999). The cognitive concept of scripts, in terms of which people understand, remember, and act in routine situations (Schank & Abelson, 1977), is approached via script formulations, in which people describe things as routine and do things with those descriptions (Edwards, 1994, 1995a, 1997a).

The point of respecification is not to provide studies of the same things as are theorized in psychology, but viewed through discourse. Rather, it leads to very different understandings of what is going on. Rather than people having memories, script knowledge, attitudes, and so on, that they carry around in their heads and produce on cue (or in research interviews), people are shown to formulate or work up the nature of events, actions, and their own accountability through ways of talking. These ways of talking are both constructive and action oriented. They are constructive in the sense that they offer a particular version of things when there are indefinitely many potential versions, some of which may be available and alive in the setting. Examples include a partner’s alternative narrative of events, produced during relationship counseling (Edwards, 1995a) or Bill Clinton’s accounts under cross-examination of what he did on various occasions with Monica Lewinsky (Locke & Edwards, 2003). Accounts are also action oriented in the sense that they are constructed in ways that perform actions in and for the occasion of their telling. A particular version of events may, for instance, account for the refusal of an offer (Drew, 1984) or produce the speaker as rational rather than prejudiced (Edwards, 2003).

¹ Respecification is a term borrowed from ethnomethodology; see Button (1991).

It is not a matter of finding a list of ready-made psychological topics and trying to respecify them. Rather, it works the other way around. In analyzing discourse, we find people doing the kinds of things for which psychology has developed a technical vocabulary and explanation. For example, we may find people talking on the basis that they are recalling things (cf. event memory, script theory, etc.) or offering causal explanations (cf. attribution theory), or just expressing their thoughts. When we say talking on the basis, we mean that this is what they may project themselves as doing, rather than that this is what we theorize them to be doing. In examining talk, we develop understandings that are often at odds with how those things are theorized in psychology.

We also have to introduce closely relevant topics that psychology ignores, such as factual description. Psychological treatments of causal attribution typically provide people with constructed vignettes that describe events and ask them to offer explanations. There are sound reasons for doing that, within the experimental paradigm being used, such as maintaining control over input to cognitive processes. Yet in everyday talk we find that, rather than working from fixed descriptions and inferring causes, people invariably dispute the descriptions and offer alternatives (Antaki, 1994; Edwards & Potter, 1992). Causality and responsibility are often handled indirectly, not by overt claims (from given facts) about causes and agency, but through the building of factual descriptions. So there is a realm of factual discourse, its construction and uses, with relevance to handling a range of psychological business, that DP has largely opened up (Edwards, 1997a; Potter, 1996).

Extract 1 is an example of participants' use of description and redescription in handling implications about agency and reasons for actions by characterizing those actions in particular ways. The extract is taken from an interview between a police officer (P1) and a witness and crime suspect (W); it picks up W's story where he has returned to the place where he lives from the scene of a violent crime in which he claims no direct involvement. "They" (line 1) are the two alleged perpetrators, who occupy other rooms in the house in which W lives and had returned there soon after W did. Police officer P1 is pursuing the extent of W's own part in the assault.

Extract 1 (DE: Beveridge:p.24)

- 1 P1: Yeh.= They've come in through the front door.=
 2 How long after that did you hear us.
 3 (0.9)
 4 P1: police arriving [()]
 5 W: [Ohffff] (.) Within five minutes?
 6 (5.0)
 7 P1: ↑You: (0.6) run out the back.h
 8 (0.6)
 9 W: Well. (.) I opened the back door like I js seen
 10 two people at the back door like that n jus go
 11 like that n jus stuck my hand up n said well
 12 it's fuck all to do with me.
 13 (0.3)
 14 Which it was.
 15 (0.2)
 16 P1: Right.
 17 (1.9)

Let us focus on lines 7–12. Note how P1’s description, put to W as “You run out the back,” is reformulated by W. The narrative action “run out the back” follows the arrival of the police, and implies some kind of relevantly urgent escape or avoidance of them. Of course, this is a standard trope in the commonsense discourse of police pursuit—if you weren’t guilty, why run away? Rather than explain why he ran (as would be required by an experimental attributional vignette—“Joe ran away. Why?”), W redescribes what happened such that any notion of running away is avoided. Small details operate here to set up the reworking done by W. Note how the item “Well” (line 9) anticipates the altered version (cf. Schiffrin, 1987, on *well* and other “discourse markers” and the chapters in Atkinson & Heritage, 1984, on its use in marking “dispreferred turn shapes”). Also the repeated word “just” or “js” (lines 9–11) signals the unremarkable nature of what W did, in contrast to running away. The presence of police is reduced to “two people” (line 10), and W’s actions are now restricted to an innocent, emphatic denial of any involvement (line 12) in the crime (“it”) that the police had presumably come to investigate.

The relevance of this kind of example to respecification and critique is what it tells us about how people talk about events. Rather than talking on the basis of what they can simply recall or explain, as if putting cognitive representations into words, what we find is a fine-grained construction and action orientation in talk, where versions are produced in ways that handle specific alternatives and interactional contingencies (cf. Drew, 1990). What makes it discursive psychology is the way in which psychological themes such as motive and intent, agency and involvement, are managed as part of talk’s business.

Another example of respecification is the way that people sometimes construct or work up the scripted (repeated, routine, expectable) nature of actions and events and do things with those constructions. Extract 2 (from Edwards, 1994) is from a telephone conversation transcribed by Gail Jefferson, in which Emma is complaining about her husband Bud to her sister Lottie.

Extract 2 (NB:IV:4:R:2)

- 1 → I: can’t do anything ri:ght honest to
 2 Go:d I ca:n’t. e- ↑Here I ↑worked ha:rd
 3 va::cuumi:ng ’nd hh (.) .hhh he got up
 4 ’n fe:lt it to see if there wa:s any
 5 du:st, hhh
 6 (0.8)
 7 ’Nɪs RI:DI:cu ↑lous?
 8 (0.4)
 9 Lottie: °oh: he’s crazy.°

Again, rather than approaching script formulations as the expression of underlying perceptions and cognitions, DP’s approach is to examine how scripting is done, and what it does, where it occurs. The script relevant to extract 2 is something that Emma has been working up not only in but also beyond that extract, in which her husband regularly takes pointed exception to the most harmless, even laudable things she does. In general, script formulations can serve a range of discourse functions such as building versions as factual (witnessed on many occasions, predictable), in making complaints (it’s serious, not just

a one-off), in praising or criticizing people, and in general, building them as having a particular disposition or character (Edwards, 1995a, 1997a). In extract 2 line 1, Emma's version of Bud's treatment of her is that she can't do anything right in his eyes, not just that she did something wrong one time. Rather than this being an indication of her repeated incompetence, it is built as an indication of Bud's consistent unreasonableness. The specific action described, feeling for dust, is provided as an instance of what he generally does, and in contrast to Emma's having "worked hard vacuuming." Bud's hearably unreasonable actions and criticisms are offered to Lottie (line 7) as "ridiculous," and Lottie responds by formulating his implied character: "Oh he's crazy" (line 9).

DP's practice of reworking psychological assumptions about the cognitive bases of talk are relevant well beyond psychology. There is a wide range of theory and practice across the social sciences, for instance, in many uses of interview materials, in which the content of talk is taken to represent what people generally know, think, and feel about things (see Potter & Edwards, 2001b, for a discussion in relation to sociolinguistics). Clearly thoughts, feelings, understandings, and facts are being produced and handled in some sense in talk of all kinds. DP approaches those as talk's active business in hand, rather than what lies behind it or is being expressed in it. Factual descriptions, psychological states, and personal characteristics are things that discourse constructs, implies, and does things with.

EXPLORING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL THESAURUS

In addition to respecification and critique of concepts in academic psychology, DP explores the workings of psychological common sense. This involves the everyday, situated uses of psychological categories, such as words for emotional and cognitive states (angry, believe, know, jealous, etc.). Again, this kind of study stands in contrast to mainstream psychology in various ways. Rather than starting from the principle that folk psychology is an inaccurate and inconsistent theory of mind that needs to be replaced by the superior technical vocabulary of experimental psychology or cognitive science (Stich, 1983),² we investigate how it works in discourse. Once we start to appreciate the rich and systematic uses to which everyday psychological concepts are put, their status as potentially inaccurate pictures of a real mental life going on behind the scenes becomes irrelevant and misconceived. The folk psychology thesaurus has its own reality as the actual terms used by people to perform the actions done in and through everyday discourse. As such, it is amenable to empirical study.

There is a range of DP work on rhetorical and interactional uses of emotion terms (e.g., Edwards, 1997a, 1999; cf. Coulter, 1989, and Harré & Parrott, 1996). Emotion terms have their particular uses (see also anthropological and historical investigations such as Lutz, 1988, and Stearns, 1989), but also the choice of emotional descriptions rather than, or alternating with, cognitive expressions such as know or believe is important. It can be highly constructive of the nature and accountability of actions and events.

²Wittgensteinian critiques of cognitive science's ambition to supersede common sense accountability can be found in various sources, including Button, Coulter, Lee, & Sharrock (1995) and Harré (1988).

Take, for example, a small extract from a newspaper report following the death of Princess Diana (see also Edwards, 1999). Part of the press's concern was to counter its own potential culpability in Diana's death, namely, its role in the employment of the paparazzi photographers who, it seemed at that time, may have been directly to blame. Extract 4 is from an editorial in the *Sun*, a popular tabloid British newspaper.

Extract 3 (*The Sun*, 1st, September 1997, p.10; original headline capitals)

- 1 DON'T BLAME THE PRESS
- 2 THE SUN SAYS
- 3 In the depths of his grief, Diana's brother
- 4 is entitled to be bitter about her death
- 5 (. . .)
- 6 At such a harrowing time, we can
- 7 understand his emotional outburst

The *Sun* was responding to a news broadcast the night before, in which Diana's brother Earl Spencer had said: "I always believed the press would kill her in the end." The thing of interest here is the use of emotion descriptions in the *Sun*'s editorial. Note that Spencer had not offered his assessment of the press as an expression of grief. Indeed, it was something he had "always believed," where "always" places his judgment prior to the trauma of his sister's death, and "believed" defines it cognitively, as judgment rather than feeling. In contrast, the *Sun* defines Spencer as speaking out of deep emotion.

Furthermore, the emotion Spencer apparently speaks from is grief rather than, say, anger. Grief's intentional object,³ of course, would be his sister's death. Anger's object would (in this example) be the press. So not only is Spencer talking out of emotion rather than perception or belief, but the specific emotion given is one that directs us back to his sister's recent death for its cause or explanation, rather than to the activities of the press, which were the clear target of Spencer's remarks. Another category offered for Spencer is bitter (line 4). The word "bitter" invokes excess as well as a disposition for saying harsh things. Yet even here, Spencer is depicted as "bitter about her death" rather than about the press's role in it. The point of this brief illustration is to suggest ways in which psychological predicates provide rhetorical options and trajectories. These are discourse options, ways of talking and writing, ways of constructing the nature of events one way rather than another, and of avoiding or countering alternative senses of events that may be alive at the time. Of course, the *Sun*'s take-home message is given explicitly in the headline: "Don't blame the press."

One of the arenas that we noted for DP's respecification and critique was that of studying evaluative practices rather than measuring underlying attitudes. This approach can be linked with studying uses of evaluative expressions, such as when people say they like something. Formulating personal preferences can be used, among other things, in making rhetorical contrasts between what one might prefer and what external reality

³In conceptual analysis, emotion words, unlike terms for moods and sensations, take intentional objects (Bedford, 1986). One is angry *at* something, grieving *for* someone, and so on.

imposes. And that in turn can be a way of managing indexical properties of evaluative talk, where what a person says can be taken as a reflection on the speaker. Extract 4 is taken from an interview from the early 1980s (R is the interviewee; I is the interviewer) in New Zealand concerning a controversial South African rugby tour, prior to that country's abandonment of apartheid (see Edwards, 2003, for more discussion of this and other examples, and Wetherell & Potter, 1992, for an extended study of the larger data set).

Extract 4 (NZInt2: p.19)

- 1 R: Uhm (1.2) I would li:ke to see apartheid done
 2 away with
 3 (1.0)
 4 but can anybody come up with a- [a (.)
 5 I: [Mm mhm
 6 R: positive way of saying 'This is how it can be
 7 done'
 8 I: Mm mhm
 9 R: It's all very well to turn round and say 'Give
 10 'em a vote'
 11 I: Yes
 12 R: I mean the majority of them (1.0) don't know
 13 what a vote is
 14 I: Mm mhm

R's argument for apartheid occurs in the context (not reproduced here) of justifying his support of the controversial rugby tour. In stating what he "would like," he is able to make a case in favor of apartheid, while countering what that might say about him indexically, that he personally approves of it. Rather, his position is presented as one that is forced by practical realities. The notion that the speaker might be talking out of a psychological disposition is countered by locating his preferences as precisely the opposite. He would like it done away with (line 1), if only that were realistically possible. This counterdispositional construction is a feature of talk about sensitive and controversial issues, but it draws on a general device in factual discourse, which is that people will often make a dubious version or conclusion factually robust by formulating it as reluctantly arrived at. This can be of use across a wide range of settings where indexically dangerous implications are in the offing, such as in promoting anti-immigration laws against a backdrop of liberalism, or in justifying the continuing nonemployment of women in traditionally male occupations (Gill, 1993). There is more to expressions of liking than this, of course, but DP's argument is that this is the kind of thing that such expressions are for, a functional, performative basis for having them available in the language.

We can pursue evaluative expressions of this kind across other areas, such as food evaluations (Wiggins & Potter, 2003). Rather than conducting interview or focus group research on food preferences, evaluations, and eating habits, Wiggins collected a corpus of family mealtime conversations in which food evaluation, and the discourse work it does, arises in the course of everyday cooking, eating, and drinking. In everyday settings

such as these, expressions of liking, disliking, and so on, figure not as freestanding attitudinal statements, but as part of locally situated practices such as complimenting, refusing, offering, persuading, requesting, disagreeing, and so on. One important distinction that emerges is the difference between saying you like something and saying it is good or nice. The first is subjective (telling of personal reactions) and the others are objective (descriptions of the object). So even closely related terms such as “love” and “lovely” may point at different objects and lend themselves to different pragmatic uses. Objective expressions appear to be particularly useful in complimenting and persuading, for example, whereas subjective evaluations are useful in managing accountability for refusing food that others are happily eating. Of course, this is the stuff of childhood socialization (Ochs, Pontecorvo, & Fasulo, 1996) and of talk about diet, weight gain, personal responsibility, and so on, where what a person eats, when, and how much are hugely normative and evaluative matters. In extract 5, Laura is the person who has cooked the meal.

Extract 5 (SKW/G2a-M8. From Wiggins & Potter, 2003)

- 1 Doris: that was lovely Lau: ↓ra [thank ↓yo:u
 2 Bill: [because eh-
 3 Beth: it is [love ↓ly
 4 Laura: [>did you enjoy that < there is
 5 [some >d'you want <
 6 Bill: [she ↑said-
 7 Laura: there's a bit mo:re if you ↓want (0.6)
 8 >there's a bit < more ↑sauce?

In line 1 Doris uses the object-description “lovely” in praising Laura’s cooking and thanks her. Beth echoes the evaluation (line 3). In describing the meal as lovely, rather than characterizing themselves as, say, having loved it, these assessments work well as compliments. It is the food that is the topic, not what Doris and Beth might happen to like or dislike, which may be personal to them. But it is worth pursuing Laura’s uptake. Pomerantz (1978) has shown that compliments can be tricky to receive when there are conflicting norms in play; here, agreeing with assessments, on the one hand, but avoiding self-praise (boasting), on the other. Often compliments are reassigned or downgraded. Wiggins and Potter (2003) note that Laura does not agree with the evaluation of the food, using another objective description (e.g., “yes, it was, wasn’t it,” which would risk sounding boastful), but rather she reformulates the objective description in subjective terms, as them enjoying the food. As with compliment receipts generally, some deflection is done here, along with treating Beth and Doris as potentially requesting more food (lines 4–8). Although the specific details are interesting, the general point here is the way that evaluative expressions can trade on the useful differences between subject- and object-oriented descriptions in the performance of interactional business. This is, we propose, the kind of pragmatic basis on which the great range of psychological expressions is available in any language; they are designed in the first place for the pragmatics of social interaction and accountability, rather than as a set of labels for, or expressions of, discrete mental states (Edwards, 1997a).

THE MANAGEMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL BUSINESS

In addition to respecification and studying everyday uses of the psychological thesaurus, DP examines discourse for how psychological themes are handled and managed, often implicitly. We explore how agency, intent, doubt, belief, prejudice, emotional investment, commitment, and so on, are built, made available, or countered indirectly through descriptions of actions, events, objects, persons, and settings. In fact, this has been a key feature of the kinds of respecification that has been done, where attributions of intent and agency are shown to be handled, not by overt descriptions of intent or motive, but through what look like (or are produced as) straightforward event descriptions. It is the basis of DP's explorations of "fact and accountability" (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Edwards, 2001a), where we show how factual descriptions are used to implicate a range of psychological states and attributions and vice versa. Again, reinforcing the arbitrariness of our three strands of DP work when it comes to actual analyses, this kind of psychologically implicative use of factual descriptions is closely tied to participants' uses of the psychological thesaurus, as in extract 6.

Extract 6 (DE-JF:C2:S1:p. 9)

- 1 J: And uh:: (1.0) Connie had a short skirt on
 2 I don' know.
 3 (1.0)
 4 And I knew this- (0.6) uh ah- maybe I had
 5 met him.
 6 (1.0)
 7 Ye:h. (.) I musta met Da:ve before.
 8 (0.8)
 9 But I'd heard he was a bit of a la:d (.).
 10 He didn't care: (1.0) who he (0.2) chatted
 11 up or (.) who was in Ireland (.) y'know
 12 those were (unavailable) to chat up with.
 13 (1.0)
 14 So Connie stood up (0.8) pulled her skirt
 15 right up her side (0.6) and she was looking
 16 straight at Da:ve (.) >°like that°< (0.6) and
 17 then turned and looked at me (1.2) and then
 18 she said w- (.) turned and then (.) back to
 19 Dave and said (.) by the way that wasn't
 20 for you.

Extract 6 is part of an extended sequence from an hour-long counseling session, in which a husband and wife (Connie and Jimmy) are recounting their problems with each other. Connie has described Jimmy as an endemically jealous person, prone to recurrent and unreasonable fits of jealousy.⁴ The descriptive detail in line 1, "Connie had a short

⁴Connie described Jimmy a couple of minutes earlier as "extremely jealous. Extremely jealous person. Has always been, from the day we met. . . it was totally ridiculous the way he goes on, through this problem that he has." Extract (6) is part of Jimmy's extended response to that and other things. See also Edwards (1995, 1997).

skirt on,” depicts her (and her subsequently narrated actions build on this) as dressed in a sexually relevant or provocative way. It is part of how Jimmy builds his wife’s character and motives as flirtatious (and therefore making his jealousy reasonable), along with directing her behavior on this particular occasion at a reputed “bit of a lad” named Dave (line 9), in which Dave is positioned as a recipient of Connie’s actions and appearance. The descriptive details work, not only through what they include, but through what they might well have mentioned but do not. Of all that she wore, it is only the short skirt that is mentioned (here or elsewhere in the session), and of all the skirt’s describable characteristics, only its brevity is remarked on.

The sequential positioning of the description is also important. It occurs immediately before (and thus is hearably relevant to) the introduction of Dave. We can hear Connie’s motivation and character being set up here, as something like flirtatious and sexy, and as targeting Dave (this explicitly, in lines 15–16). It is done not by overtly calling his wife sexually motivated and flirtatious, but by making those kinds of characteristics inferentially available. Indeed, they are categories that Connie herself orients to in a similarly indirect manner (in a subsequent long turn not presented here), by providing alternative, contrasting descriptions of the length of her skirt, what she did with it, and at whom she was looking. So Connie’s character, motives, and intentions (standard psychological stuff) are built and countered by descriptions of witnessable things—her skirt and her actions, the proximity of those things to the descriptions of Dave, and their place in the narrative sequence.

There are also some psychological thesaurus terms in the extract, including Jimmy’s “I don’t know” in line 2. It would be a mistake to hear this as simply an assertion of ignorance or uncertainty, or even as an assertion at all (it is said parenthetically, with no explicit object). What it does, like the rest of the sequence in which it occurs, is attend to Jimmy’s own character, as a purportedly jealous and suspicious husband who may be prone (in this case) to some kind of obsessive monitoring of the details of his wife’s clothing and behavior. The use here, and just here, of “I don’t know” counters that. It implies that he wasn’t paying particular attention, and does not have a lot hanging on it. In fact, this kind of interpersonal use of “I don’t know” or “I dunno” (used in this parenthetical, framing kind of way, rather than as a bald answer to a factual question), recurs across a range of discourse materials as a way of handling, or playing down, the speaker’s stake or interest in the content of a description (Potter, 1998b; see also Beach & Metzger, 1997). Indeed, Jimmy’s subsequent narrative conveys his close attention to (and implied knowledge of) the details of Connie’s skirt, its length, and what she did with it. So expressions such as “I don’t know” can do interactional work of this kind, attending to potential commonsense inferences and rhetorical alternatives at stake in the interaction, such as, in this case, that he is a suspicious, overjealous husband prone to persecuting his wife over small, exaggerated things that are more in his head than in the world, more a reflection of his own preoccupations than of his wife’s actual clothing, actions, or character. Clearly, the way that discourse handles psychological categories is not just a matter of using overt psychological words.

Extract 7 (from Edwards, 2000) is a sequence showing how descriptions, assessments, and particularly the uses of extreme case formulations (ECFs—see also Pomerantz, 1986) might be treated by participants as not only describing and assessing the objects they are

applied to, but also, as we have seen in other examples in this chapter, indexing the speaker's stance or attitude.⁵ ECFs are extreme expressions such as "the best," "the most," "brand new," and so on. The speaker-indexical property of ECFs trades on their potential to be heard not only as extreme but as going to extremes and thus as saying, perhaps, more than mere accuracy would require. In the extract, L's mother M is saying, of L's mother-in-law Mrs. Field, that she would have no right to complain, should she find out that she is not being invited to a memorial service for Louisa, a person she treated badly.

Extract 7 (Holt:X(C)1:1:1:30)

- 1 M: How dare she expect t'be there.
 2 L: I kno:w ye:s,
 3 M: She wz so wicked to Lou:isa.
 4 (0.6)
 5 L: Mm hhm hm
 6 → M: All those years ago.
 7 L: Ye:s.
 8 (.)
 9 L: O[ka:y love]
 10 M: [(A : : s u]sual.) If Louisa had (know:n)
 11 she wouldn't 've uh (0.5) carted Missiz Field
 12 → abou:t like she did (.) all the time,
 13 (0.2)
 14 L: No.,
 15 M: Taking 'er to to:wn an' to do ()- do 'er
 16 → shopping (0.3) everywhere she wanted to go
 17 Louisa used to take 'er in the ca:r,
 18 (0.2)
 19 L: Ye:s th't's ri:ght,
 20 M: Yep
 21 (0.2)
 22 L: °M[m°
 23 M: [Got quite a lot'v (0.4) service out'v Louisa,
 24 L: Ye(h)es ↓hn hn↓ .hhh
 25 (.)
 26 M: Okay love
 27 L: Bye then,
 28 (.)
 29 M: Mustn't grumble, (hm-[hm)
 30 L: [No,

M's ECFs are shown at lines 6, 12, and 16. The key to seeing how they work is their sequential environment, a move that draws on a major principle of conversation analysis (see chapter 4, this volume). L's receipts of M's complaints about Mrs. Field, although not

⁵We use the term *attitude* in this context as a commonsense part of the everyday psychological thesaurus, not as any endorsement of psychological attitude theory.

overtly disagreeing, are muted or minimal; they acknowledge but do not take up or add anything to M's complaints. This response is notable, given the finding that agreement is normatively displayed by providing second assessments and especially upgraded ones (Pomerantz, 1984). Jefferson noted on her transcript of these data, in a footnote to line 5, that "throughout this segment, L seems to be doing friendly censorship of M's talk about Mrs. Field." M's observations on Mrs. Field move from critical remarks ("how dare she," "so wicked," lines 1 and 3), through the series of ECFs ("all those years ago," "all the time," "everywhere") and end with the softened formulation "quite a lot of service" (line 23).

M's escalation to ECFs fails to produce strongly affiliative observations from L, who at line 9 seems to be moving to end the call (cf. M at 26 and L's uptake at 27), closing off M's incipient complaints about Mrs. Field. M's eventual "mustn't grumble" (line 29) is a further withdrawal from the complaints she has been making. However, importantly, it also formulates grumbling as a sanctionable version of what she has been doing. As such, it orients to L's withheld affiliation, her friendly censorship of M, and aligns with the notion that M's complaints about Mrs. Field were heard by L not merely as descriptions of Mrs. Field but as indicative of M's investment in those descriptions, as expressions of attitude, as possibly grumbling. Given that ECFs are used for insisting on, highlighting, or emphasizing a point (Pomerantz, 1986), they are simultaneously available to be heard by coparticipants as signaling a speaker's investment in that point. Denying or insisting on something in an extreme way can highlight the action of denying or insisting as a kind of stance or investment. It is a pervasive theme of DP to examine the ways in which participants manage the relationship between mind and world, or subject and object, when producing descriptions and accounts.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Discursive psychology is still in the making. Whether it fragments further, reintegrates, or makes stronger alliances with other approaches is yet to be seen. However, we can list a few current developments here.

There has been a clear commitment in the work of Edwards and Potter, in particular, toward the use of natural data (rather than, say, research interviews) and toward grounding analysis in the principles of CA. This preference for CA and naturally occurring data follows the foundational principle that discourse is performative, or action oriented. Given that principle, it makes sense to find discourse at work doing the things it does, wherever those things happen. So we find ourselves analyzing counseling sessions, mundane telephone conversations, newspaper reports, help-line talk, police interrogations, and so on, rather than interviewing people for their views on topics put to them, as it were, offstage. Research interviews remain thoroughly analyzable, of course, but they are not the first resort when we look for data.

There remains a major line of inquiry into what we have loosely called mind-world or subject-object features of talk. This inquiry is coupled with an interest in how that kind of talk works in institutional settings of various kinds (Edwards & Potter, 2001) as an endemic feature of the normative functioning of those settings. This extends a

long-standing interest in that kind of theme, including the study of teaching and learning in school classrooms (Edwards & Mercer, 1987), but now applies the more recent developments in discourse analysis methods grounded more in CA (Edwards, 1997b; Potter, 1996). Current research by a range of people located mainly at Loughborough University in the United Kingdom, but also scattered increasingly widely, is looking at how DP themes are handled in, and indeed somewhat constitutive of, practical settings. For example, we are examining the talk through which child abuse help lines work, and also police interrogations, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, family and individual therapy, legal disputes over child access following marriage breakups, and neighborhood dispute mediation, as well as arenas of mundane talk such as domestic telephone calls and family mealtime conversations.

Further growth points include moves to clarify and develop DP's relationship to CA, ethnomethodology, and the ordinary language philosophies of Wittgenstein and Ryle. A number of critical discussions are under way of the status of what we have called here the psychological thesaurus, including the sense in which it is, to begin with, properly conceived as psychological. These discussions include a review by Coulter (1999) of various studies that use the term DP, responses to that review (Edwards & Potter, in press; Potter & Edwards, 2003), and continuing efforts to derive relevant analytic principles from Harvey Sacks's foundational writings on CA and membership categorization analysis (Edwards, 1995b, 1997a; McHoul & Rapley, 2003). However, the major thrust is in the continuing empirically grounded exploration of how psychological themes are handled and managed in discourse in the performance of a wide range of interactional business.

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