

A Model of Discourse in Action

JONATHAN POTTER

DEREK EDWARDS

Loughborough University

MARGARET WETHERELL

Open University

In the past 15 years or so, a number of varied strands of research have been dubbed "discourse analysis": speech act oriented studies of conversational coherence (e.g., Coulthard & Montgomery, 1981); so-called discourse processes work on story grammars and the like (e.g., van Dijk & Kintch, 1983); the "Continental" discourse analysis of Foucault (e.g., 1971), which has been concerned with showing the way that different cultural entities are constituted discursively as well as the historical development of that constitution; and, finally, specific developments within the sociology of science that arose in part as a consequence of methodological debates on the role of discourse in research methods (e.g., Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984). The approach we have developed (Edwards & Potter, 1992a, 1992b, in press; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988) draws on important features of both the Continental and the sociology of science work, although it is also strongly influenced by developments in conversation analysis (e.g., Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) and rhetoric (e.g., Billig, 1987). It also emphasizes the centrality of constructionist processes (Gergen, 1985), and this is a facet of discourse analysis that we develop further in the current article.

At its most basic, we see discourse analysis as being the theory of, and method of studying, social practices and the actions that constitute them. As such, it offers an alternative to the cognitivist paradigm dominant in general psychology and the specific social cognition paradigm of social psychology. Over the past few years, part of the energy of discourse analysts has been devoted to showing how the central theoretical notions of cognitivism (e.g., remembering, attribution, categorization) can be reworked in discursive terms. This reworking, in turn, raises important questions about the way these notions are understood within the context of more traditional cognitivist

approaches. Indeed, for this reason, and to combat interpretations that consider discourse analysis simply as a method that can be "plugged in" when answering questions developed using the assumptions of alternative approaches, we have suggested that discourse analysis can form the basis of a distinctive *discursive psychology* (Edwards & Potter, 1992a). Yet we must also stress our qualified sense of the notion of *psychology* here. Although this is an approach that reworks basic psychological phenomena, it has also been directed at themes and topics more commonly seen as the province of communication, cultural studies, and sociology (Billig, 1992; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). The aim is certainly not to replace one psychology of individuals with another.

This article overviews this discursive approach to psychology in two stages. First, we outline some of the basic ontological commitments of cognitivist psychology (either "pure" or social), showing some of the difficulties that discursive psychology raises for them. These stem, we argue, from a failure to adequately conceptualize the central role of "factual versions" (reports, descriptions, representations, etc.) in social life. Second, and for the greater part of the article, we overview a model that integrates together various discursive phenomena, indicating general areas of research support.

IDENTITY-MIND-REALITY: SOME ONTOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS QUESTIONED

Much of mainstream cognitivist psychology works more or less explicitly with a threefold ontology of identity/personality, mind, and reality, represented as follows:

Identity/personality—There is an actor who has a range of defining features: a personality, a self or identity, and possibly a range of commonly available roles.

Mind—Within the actor are a variety of entities that are basic to the explanation of behavior: attitudes, attributional schemata, category systems, memories, social representations and so on. These are treated as cognitive processes or mental events, and together they largely make up what psychologists gloss as mind.

Reality—The actor is construed as acting in some environment, the world, the situation, or context. This may consist of other people, social settings, or various physical objects and events.

Having accepted these assumptions, the orthodox psychological task is to discover what is going on in the first two of these realms, which are opaque

areas needing to be penetrated. Psychologists attempt to elucidate characteristics of the person, or identity, or alternatively, and more commonly now, to identify features of mind: cognitive entities or processes. Often, these two realms are treated as interdependent. In contrast, the third realm, reality, is treated as unproblematic, something that the researcher has clear access to and can be used as a criterion against which to measure the behavior of subjects. For example, in the typical memory study, the adequacy of memory, the pattern of "distortion," or whatever, is compared against the actual "stimulus materials" or against "what actually happened." In the typical attribution study, the sense of vignettes is treated as transparent to the researcher, who is concerned about inferences made by participants. Moreover, it is notable that in each of these cases textual materials of one kind or another are taken as a stand-in for events or persons. They presuppose that the world is simply and neutrally represented in texts.

One of the features of discursive psychology that distinguishes it from cognitivist approaches is that it questions the simplicity and neutrality of rendering the world into versions as well as the assumption of epistemological privilege that goes with it. The argument can be made on both conceptual and analytic grounds. There is a variety of conceptual arguments about the nature of description; these arguments stress the indefiniteness or open-endedness of descriptions, the varied ways in which scenes or events can be formulated, and the impossibility of producing a single definitive version free of interests or perspective (e.g., Kuhn, 1970; Popper, 1959; Wittgenstein, 1953). The point here is that given the open-endedness of any description, why should the psychologist choose one particular one as unproblematically correct for comparison with participants' partial versions?

The implications of these conceptual arguments in practice can be seen from the range of work on the practical nature of description and the role of reports or formulations in specific interactions (e.g., Drew, 1984; Heritage & Watson, 1979; Pomerantz, 1987; Schegloff, 1972; Wooffit, 1992). The important point from this work is that description of a participant's activity is not merely open-ended and flexible but also an important way of performing actions. For example, Pomerantz (1980) shows the way in which specific sorts of descriptions (those displaying partial knowledge in context where the recipient has full knowledge) are used for performing delicate actions such as eliciting an invitation to a party or remaking a broken doctor's appointment without being heard as complaining, as in the following:

Desk: Hello G ____
Janet: Ehm good mohming. eh it's Missiz
R ____ heuh, I ca:lled in on

Thuhrsdäy: tih see: if uh I c'd
 make en appointment t'see
 Mistuh T
 (1.2)

Janet: An., I haven't hurred anything'n I
 wz wondring if: uh:m I c'd possibly
 see im one day next week. (p. 193)

Pomerantz notes here the way in which the caller tells just what she knows without formulating items that are a possible source of complaint.

The point of these arguments, then, is to show, first, that there is an open-endedness to description, which means that when a psychologist opts for a particular version he or she is assuming a kind of epistemological privilege (taking, without justification, one version as more correct than potential alternatives) and, second, that the choice of version may be a highly consequential matter for participants. A particular description, a particular style of description, the use of particular terms, and so on may be precisely the way a specific action gets done. By choosing one version rather than another, psychologists can be siding, without realizing it, with one argumentative position rather than another or with some participants rather than others. That is not to say that participants themselves do not at times treat descriptions as straightforward—yet this very straightforwardness in description can *itself* be analyzed as an outcome of participants' practices: doing a "straightforward description" can be a way of warranting a version as factual: merely "telling it how it is" (see Edwards & Potter, 1992a; Potter & Edwards, 1990).

The failure to make problematic the epistemological status of versions is part of a more general lack of concern on the part of psychologists with factual versions and their role in social life. It is striking, for example, that there is virtually no social psychology of fact and description, and what moves there are in this direction—most notably in the fields of social representations (Moscovici, 1984) and the psychology of knowledge (Kruglanski, 1990)—tend to start from precisely the assumption of epistemological privilege we have been questioning.

To summarize, then, we have put the case for taking the "reality" or context of action to be something *constructed by participants* in the course of their social practices and not something that should be legislated by the researcher without consideration of those practices. Our response to this issue is to take factual discourse as one of our central research topics. This involves studying the way that particular versions (reports) are made to appear factual and independent of speakers or writers and—equally important—investigating

the different activities that can be done with factual discourse. The form that such research would take is developed later in this article.

So far in this section we have focused discussion on the third ontological realm of cognitivist psychology: reality. Having made this argument, we can follow its consequences through for the way in which psychologists deal with the other two basic realms in their ontology: identity and mind. In everyday life, one of the central themes of people's talk is their "inner life": their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, goals, and so on. Another is their own and, perhaps more commonly, others' identities: what certain people are like, their foibles, defects, charms, and so on. One of the features of this talk of course, is that it is full of descriptions, representations, and factual claims of one kind or another. That is, much of it is the same *kind* of talk as we have already discussed with respect to the way that versions of reality are constructed. Indeed, for participants, the contents of mind and what people are like is as much part of their local realities as whether the threat of nuclear war has been reduced or whether they have been invited to Saturday's party. This means that the same arguments apply in these two realms as in the realm designated external "reality" (Coulter, 1979, 1989; Harré, 1983; Peräkylä & Silverman, 1991).

Here, too, versions can be constructed to do particular kinds of activities. For example, a person may offer a description of his or her motives in the course of declining an offer, which lessens hurt and displays sympathetic understanding (Drew, 1984; Heritage, 1984). In this case, S's wife has just slipped a disc:

H: And we were wondering if there's anything
 we can do to help

S: [Well 'at's]

H: [I mean] can we do any shopping for her or
 something like tha:t?
 (0.7)

S: Well that's most ki:nd Heatherton .hhh At the moment
 no:. because we've still got two bo:ys at home.
 (Heritage, 1984, p. 271)

S here constructs the motive for rejection in terms of a description indicating lack of necessity rather than suggestion that she either does not want help or the offer is not appreciated. It is important to stress that the suggestion is not that people are simply being strategically manipulative or deceptive here—the analysis is agnostic with respect to issues of "planning" or "real motive" (see Heritage, 1990-1991). It is not trying to slip some commonsense cognitivism in through the back door.

The point is that once we embark on this line of thinking it becomes difficult to sustain a strong distinction between the three realms of mind, identity, and the world. The consequence of starting to address constructionist processes in the first realm is that we can quickly see them at work in *all three* of these areas. Furthermore, we can start to see complex patterns of inference between them in ordinary talk. For example, people can construct versions of how the world is that will warrant a version of something that has gone on in their mind—that is, a particular version of how some *event* happened can be the basis for the current speaker's *motive*. A version describing in detail another's exploitative actions *displays* a motive for being cross with that person (see Mills, 1940).

The general upshot of this type of reasoning has been to break down the basic ontological divisions assumed in psychology between mind, persons, and reality. All these things are reworked in terms of their constructed versions in discursive practices. Indeed, not only is this ontological divide broken down, but the standard subdivisions between different kinds of psychological inquiry start to become increasingly problematic. Psychological and social psychological concepts become reworked as parts of a range of discursive practices, creating the possibility of complex interrelationships and putting into question some of the discrete process models that have been one of cognitive psychology's most important legacies over the past two decades. To see this latter point more clearly, we provide an overview and build on a model of discourse in action (Edwards & Potter, 1992a).

DISCOURSE IN ACTION

The Discursive Action Model (DAM) is designed to link different features of participants' discourse together in a systematic manner, paying particular attention to workings of these features in participants' social practices. At the same time, this model emphasizes connections between psychological concepts previously kept separate. Mind, identity, and reality all enter into the model—but as matters of *representation*, not things in themselves. It is not a process model in the more customary cognitive psychological sense; that is, it does not link together putative mental operations to show how input is transformed to a different output. Indeed, it is not an individualistic model at all. On one hand, it refers to discourse that may be the product of more than one person (e.g., newspaper reports), that may be produced interactionally (e.g., John Dean's Watergate testimony) and without any necessity for conscious planning; on the other hand, it captures features of participants' descriptions that refer to subparts of actors ("He was struggling with his conscience") and broad collectivities ("The middle classes don't understand

TABLE 1: Discursive Action Model

Action	
1.	The research focus is on <i>action</i> rather than <i>cognition</i> or <i>behavior</i> .
2.	As action is predominantly, and most clearly, performed through <i>discourse</i> , traditional psychological concepts (memory, attribution, categorization, etc.) are reconceptualized in discursive terms.
3.	Actions done in discourse are overwhelmingly situated in broader <i>activity sequences</i> of various kinds.
Fact and Interest	
4.	In the case of many actions, there is a <i>dilemma of stake or interest</i> , which is often managed by doing attribution via factual reports and descriptions.
5.	Reports and descriptions are therefore constituted/displayed as factual by a variety of discursive devices.
6.	Factual versions are <i>rhetorically organized</i> to undermine alternatives.
Accountability	
7.	Factual versions attend to agency and accountability <i>in the reported events</i> .
8.	Factual versions attend to agency and accountability in the current speaker's actions, including those done <i>in the reporting</i> .
9.	Concerns 7 and 8 are often related, such that 7 is <i>deployed for</i> 8, and 8 is <i>deployed for</i> 7.

poverty") as well as individual actors. It is an attempt to specify some of the central features of the way that people's discourse is organized in the conduct of social actions.

The model is divided into nine subparts organized broadly into three themes: action, fact and interest, and accountability. We start by summarily listing them (see Table 1) and then go on to flesh out the parts in more detail.

Action

Counter to the current trend toward increasingly cognitivist explanations in psychology, this model is focused specifically on action; and overwhelmingly *action done through discourse* (DAM Point 1). This does not mean, however, that it is simply marking out some new research territory, nor is it proposing merely a new methodological orientation—although it is undoubtedly doing both of these things. One of our main aims has been to show how phenomena previously understood in cognitivist terms can fruitfully be reconceptualized as parts of a discursive psychology.

In the light of our discussion above about the importance of the constructed and open-ended nature of versions of "reality," it is notable that many of the central concepts that make up the theoretical discourse of psychologists

are representational. That is, they are focused on the manner through which participants perceive, visualize, or characterize some features of reality. Memories, social representations, categories, attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes, prototypes, and schemata have this characteristic. For the cognitivist, the interest is primarily in how mental processes of one kind or another transform people's perception and understanding of the world and influence subsequent action. The dominant assumption guiding psychological theorizing is not merely cognitivism but, rather, perceptual cognitivism: Our cognitive constructions of reality are taken to be based in perception, and perception in some shape or form provides a way of grounding cognitive processes in reality (e.g., Neisser, 1976; Shaver, 1983).

In contrast, discursive psychology is concerned with how representations are constructed within, and constitutive of, social practices. Take memory or remembering, for example. One theme in discursive psychology is the way in which reports of past events are constructed to perform particular acts such as blamings or excuses (Edwards, Middleton, & Potter, 1992). A major reason for describing something that happened in the past is that there is some issue at stake. The following example is from a rape trial (Drew, 1990; see also Wooffitt, 1990, on the same material). The counsel for the defense (C) is examining the central prosecution witness (W), the victim of the alleged rape:

- C [referring to a club where the defendant and the victim met]: It's where girls and fellas meet, isn't it?
 W: People go there.

Both counsel and the witness produce versions of the activities that take place in the club. These versions are not formally contradictory, yet they can be the basis for different inferences on the part of the jury. In particular, counsel's description ("It's where girls and fellas meet") gives an impression of the intentions and expectations the clientele might have of one another which is a commonplace of rape defenses. The witness's alternative reply ("people go there") neutralizes these implications. The adequacy or generality of this analysis is not the issue here; rather its point is to show the way in which remembering can be reconceptualized in terms of discursive constructions of reality that are parts of social actions (DAM Point 2).

We can illustrate three further themes in discursive psychology using this example. First, it shows how we can make sense of other psychological notions in discursive terms. One of the main features of the discourse in this passage is that it relates to the central legal issue: What is the responsibility of the defendant for the crime? Looked at in common psychological parlance a court case is an arena for *attribution*. Indeed, in many respects, memory and attribution are two sides of the same coin. A memory can be constructed

in talk precisely for the inferences it makes available about the responsibility of various parties (Edwards & Potter, 1992a, 1992b, in press; see Bogen & Lynch, 1989). However, it is important to emphasize that when we are referring to attribution here we are reconstructing it in terms of discursive practices for the allocation of responsibility and blame and not wishing to buy into the customary attributional ontology of mental heuristics and processes (Edwards & Potter, 1992b).

A second theme illustrated in this brief extract is the use of *categorizations*: "girls," "fellas," "people." Again, rather than look at these as merely traces of underlying cognitive structures, we can analyze their interactional deployment. For example, much of the effect of counsel's version derives from its use of the categories "girls" and "fellas," which not only establish gender as a relevant concern but imply a particular *style* of relationship. Constructing a sexual motive for the *victim* is the basis for an attack on her credibility. Alternative categorizations such as "men and women" or "girls and boys" would not do the same job. Counsel's categorizations contrast to the gender- and age-neutral category "people" used by the witness. A growing body of research in conversation and discourse analysis has been concerned precisely with the role of categories in social practices (e.g., Coulter, 1991; Edwards, 1991; Jayyusi, 1984; Potter & Reicher, 1987; Sacks, 1974; Watson, 1983).

The third theme illustrated by our courtroom example is that activities are often, perhaps overwhelmingly, done as parts of interaction *sequences* involving other people (DAM Point 3). These are generally interpersonal or intergroup issues involving blame, responsibility, compliment, reward, request, invitation, and so on. It is action in sequence rather than isolated individual acts that are the primary focus of discursive psychology. This kind of point has been well made in critiques of speech act theory by conversation analysts (Levinson, 1983; Schegloff, 1988). It has a particular methodological significance for psychologists and communication researchers who use content analysis in ways that almost inevitably cut across the sequential structures of interaction (see Edwards & Potter, 1992b; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Fact and Interest

Up to now in this article we have placed a lot of emphasis on the role of *versions* in people's everyday practices. This raises the question of why people should conduct activities indirectly via versions rather than through more direct means. Why, for example, does counsel in the trial extract above embed implications about the witness's reasons for visiting the club in a

version of its nature rather than making the suggestions more explicitly? A variety of motivations are potentially at work here. However, we have been particularly interested in the way that participants can use versions to manage what we have called the *dilemma of stake or interest* (DAM Point 4).

One of the features of interaction between people and groups is that they are commonly taken as entities with desires, motives, institutional allegiances, and so on. That is, they are taken as entities with a personal or institutional *stake or interest* in their actions. The referencing of such a stake is one principal way of discounting the significance of an action or reworking its nature. For example, a blaming can be discounted as merely a product of spite; an offer may be discounted as an attempt to influence. In the trial example above, the institutionalized roles of the defense counsel and the principal witness provide resources for discounting their claims or the significance of their versions.

There is no single way to manage this dilemma. Yet research has started to explore in some detail the way in which people use reports, descriptions, or versions to this end (see Pomerantz, 1984b). A sensitive action such as a blaming or a request can be accomplished by providing an ostensibly disinterested factual report (Drew, 1984). This allows the recipient, or important others such as the jury, to follow through the implications rather than have the speaker or writer formulate them explicitly (see Wowk, 1984).

This perspective on the role of ostensibly factual versions has important implications for the way we construe traditional psychological notions such as *attitudes* and, more specifically, *prejudice* and *discrimination*. Attitudes are treated by psychologists as evaluative positions held by people. As such they are taken to be features of individual psychology rather than features of the world. Yet if we look at the issue of evaluation from the point of view of participants, things look rather more complicated. The speaker of attitudes is caught in the dilemma of interest; that is, their attitudes may be treated as having psychological motivations that are the subject of censure of some kind (Potter & Wetherell, 1988). This is potentially the case with any attitudes; however, it is a particular risk with attitudes to minority groups, for such attitude expressions may be construed as discriminatory and a product of prejudice. This is, of course, one motivation for the familiar disclaimer structure "I'm not racist but . . ." (van Dijk, 1987, 1992). This "reading through" attitudes to motives is both an everyday practice done by participants and a technical practice done by social psychologists (Billig, 1988; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Each depends on referring attitudes back to individual psychology. One of the features of discursive psychology, with its emphasis on everyday practices, is that we can start to reflexively explore the complex relationships between the common sense of people and psychol-

ogists. Indeed, the DAM could be used on the discourse of psychologists or even the articles in this current collection (see Ashmore, 1989).

The virtue of managing negative evaluations via factual versions is that the evaluation becomes a feature of the world rather than a feature of the speaker's own psychology. A version can display what is bad or good, as lying "out there" in some features of reality, as nothing to do with them, not something that they wanted or even something from which they derived satisfaction. The simple technical division between facts and attitudes fails to do justice to everyday settings where the danger of being interpreted as "having an attitude" may be precisely the motivation for constructing a factual version. Within discursive psychology, the focus is changed from attitudes as mentally encoded, potentially enduring positions to the *practices* through which evaluation is conducted and evaluative positions attributed (Billig, 1989, 1991; Maynard, 1989, 1991; Pomerantz, 1984a; Potter & Wetherell, 1988; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Once we see the importance of factual versions in these central social practices another important field of study comes to the fore. To successfully manage the dilemma of stake or interest via a factual version, it is necessary to produce a version that can actually be accepted as factual or at least one that is rhetorically organized in such a manner that it is difficult to undermine or rebut. Thus we can study the procedures that people use to construct their versions as "factual"; that is, external to the speaker and their desires and concerns (DAM Point 5). How, in other words, are factual accounts given "out-there-ness" (Smith, 1990; Wooffitt, 1992; Woolgar, 1988)?

This is not the place to review the growing body of research on this topic (see Edwards & Potter, 1992a). However, one example will give a flavor of what is being suggested here, as well as indicating a further reworking of the psychological notion of categories. One way of warranting a version as factual is to work on the *category entitlement* of the speaker (Coulter, 1991; Jayyusi, 1984; Sacks, 1974). Certain category memberships warrant, in themselves, certain sorts of knowledge. For example, doctors are often treated as knowledgeable about illness. When an "ordinary" person phones the emergency switchboard to report a disturbance the caller is questioned as to motive for the complaint and knowledge of the incident; yet the head of security at the Greyhound bus depot is treated as entitled to know—that report is not queried (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990).

Categories like this are relatively agreed on and socially stable, although they may be exploited in subtle and unexpected ways. However, a particularly interesting category entitlement is that to knowledge which any person is expected to know: how they are feeling, where it hurts, what their intentions are with respect to a shopping trip (Sacks, 1989). This means that psychol-

logical reports are produced against a background of these entitlements and can be examined as such. Put another way, deviations from such expectations can be treated as accountable matter. Discursive psychologists can study how these entitlements are constructed and occasioned, perhaps in ways that draw attention to, or attempt to rework these "any person" entitlements. For example, we can study the rhetorical work engaged in by John Dean in his Watergate testimony against expectations about what anyone would be entitled to be able to recall (Edwards & Potter, 1992b).

A further example of the exploitation of category entitlement appears in reports of crowd violence by media and political sources. One common warranting technique in media accounts of crowd events is to characterize the informant as a "community leader." This has twin rhetorical advantages. First, such category members are widely treated as knowledgeable about their community. Second, "community leader" is a category membership with no formal credentials; nor can it be warranted perceptually (as with "redhead"); it depends on the person doing particular activities and having community assent—things that are hard to clearly specify. As a consequence, this is a categorization whose fuzziness can be put to rhetorical work in that it is particularly hard to undermine (Potter & Halliday, 1990).

The final part of the fact and interest section of our model is the emphasis on factual versions being rhetorically organized to counter alternatives (DAM Point 6). The point here is that a common feature of the use of versions to perform actions is that the versions are organized to undermine some known or commonplace alternative; that is, they are designed *rhetorically*. The rape trial extract we used above is a clear and compact illustration of this. The versions "it's where girls and fellas meet" and "people go there" are rhetorically counterposed: the latter undermines inferences that might be made on the basis of the former. However, the rhetorical design of versions is not something confined to face-to-face talk nor to obviously adversarial situations such as court cases.

The discursive model highlights the way that participants orient to disputes and conflicts of interests on a range of different levels, leading to the production of rhetorically designed versions. For example, Billig (1991; see also Billig et al., 1988) argues that expressions of *attitudes* should be understood rhetorically, for the requirement to manifest an attitude appears precisely when there is a range of available alternatives that may be argued over. Indeed, attitude questionnaires incorporate such ideas, being built up from Likert-type items that are often parts of commonplace argumentative positions. And the typical *strongly agree/disagree* dimension offered is itself argumentative. Unfortunately, although attitude scales are produced in this

way, they are often interpreted as if they were recording a person's opinions in the abstract (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Accountability

In the final section of our model, we emphasize the various ways in which participants deal with *accountability* in their discourse. Attribution theory has devoted a good deal of energy to illuminating some of the ways in which accountability is treated in reported events (DAM Point 7). However, it has overwhelmingly dealt with this from the point of view of the recipient: Given some event, how do people understand the pattern of responsibility? And, as we noted above, it has conflated text and reality to a confusing degree. The discursive model spotlights the equally important issue of how a version of some event is constructed to imply responsibility (DAM Point 8). We have found it heuristically useful to distinguish *two* levels of accountability: that in the reported event and that of the current speaker who is making the report. We have started to explore the relation between these levels, such that current responsibility in producing versions can allow inferences about responsibility in some past event, whereas a version of responsibility in some past event can allow inferences about current responsibility (DAM Point 9).

Take, for example, the following extract from a television interview with then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher about the resignation of her chancellor, Nigel Lawson:

Thatcher: I tried very hard to dissuade the Chancellor from going (.2) .hh but he had made up his mind and in the end I had to accept his resignation and appoint someone else.

This extract could, with a bit of effort perhaps, be read as a mere description: a neutral telling of the facts of some past events. However, it follows a question about whether she is to blame for the resignation; in this context we can see that the description is *designed* to display her lack of blame and, more broadly, her current competence to head the government. That is, the description is offered in the specific way that it is to attend to the *current* activities of blame and mitigation. Indeed, we suggest that speakers' concern with their own accountability is likely, in most cases, to be paramount, and therefore versions in which responsibility is assigned to persons, groups, or events are *generally* likely to have this inferential relationship to the actions of the current speaker.

The pervasiveness of this inferential relationship between the construction of responsibility and causality in versions of events and the accountability of the current speaker for the actions done in talking about them is one of the

reasons why it is important for people to be able to mark what Goffman (1981; see also Levinson, 1988) calls "footing"—that is, the ability to mark when a person is speaking "for herself" or, in contrast, reporting the speech of another. Indeed, such distinctions can become quite complicated: One can be reporting the views of someone as rendered into talk by another, and there are various possible roles for being the recipient of the speech (e.g., addressed vs. unaddressed, overhearer vs. eavesdropper). The point is that an elaborate system of this kind becomes necessary so that the speaker can manage inferences about their own accountability when they are making descriptions. Marking the footing for the description is a way of indicating who should be held accountable for any inferences that might flow (see also Clayman, in press).

It is important to emphasize that we are not treating footing as something separate from the constructive and rhetorical processes that were discussed in the Fact and Interest section of our model. In a sense, the construction of footing is just one more arena of factual accounting: Footing may be an attempt to warrant a version by attributing it to a member of a category with particular entitlements to knowledge (as in the example of "community leaders"; Potter & Halliday, 1990), or it can be an attempt to draw on potentially problematic claims in the course of an argument while avoiding the noxious attributions that might be made to a supporter of those claims (as when a speaker reports "ideas put out" about the prevalence of rape in a minority group as part of a critique of immigration; Potter & Wetherell, 1988). Looked at from another direction, footing and accountability is a further way of understanding the importance of techniques of fact construction. Such techniques are a way of producing reports that originate outside the interests and desires of the speaker. Indeed, the "empiricist discourse" of science (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984) has taken this process to its logical conclusion where the scientist is merely reporting what the data or research findings "say" or "show."

More generally, when we examine the argumentative patterns in ordinary discourse we do not find the neat organization that might be expected from a person working from a consistent set of beliefs and attitudes, or a unitary "knowledge base." Rather what we see is a fragmentation—Billig (1991) calls it the "kaleidoscope of common sense"—where *explanans* and *explanandum* regularly swap places, where shifts are fluidly made between arguments from principle and practice (Litton & Potter, 1985; Wetherell, Stiven, & Potter, 1987), and where "liberal and egalitarian values" are selectively drawn on and reworked, sometimes to racist and authoritarian effect (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). This has an important methodological consequence: We are unlikely to get at the workings of social practices

through identifying particular tropes and then coding and counting them. These studies emphasize again that these things must be examined in context for their specific construction, sequential placement, and rhetorical organization.

FACTS, DESCRIPTIONS, AND DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY

At this point it is important to make some qualifications. We are not offering this as a complete model of discourse processes, nor as one that is finished even for the particular domain we have been most concerned with, namely, the use of descriptions in activity sequences. What we have tried to do is identify some links between what have previously been considered to be somewhat disparate areas of psychological investigation and to make some preliminary suggestions as to how a swath of psychological concepts can be reworked in discursive terms. So far, sustained work has been conducted on the theoretical notions of attitudes, attribution, categories, gender, memories/remembering, self, personality and identity, and social representations. One of the aims of the discursive action model is to start to map organized links between these different lines of work. At the same time we are not suggesting that psychologists or communication workers must abandon using these concepts in their more traditional ways—after all, such concepts are well-suited for many questions and issues.

It is also important to stress that although, for the purpose of our exposition, we have taken the model in sequential stages we are not suggesting that research should be organized in this way. On the contrary, much of the time, research will be concerned with issues where a number of different features of the model will be relevant simultaneously. Indeed, it is, for example, almost impossible to seriously consider fact construction without paying close attention to the relevant concerns with rhetorical alternatives and current accountability. Research should be sensitive to the particulars of the discursive practice rather than to the categories of the model. More generally, one of the features of the perspective developed by discourse analysts has been a recognition of the flexibility of participants' talk and writing when accomplishing particular actions. That is not to say that there is not pattern and organization; however, it is often organization of variation: The same activity can be done in numerous different ways, drawing on different discursive resources.

One of the most important features of this model with respect to alternative schemes for understanding human conduct developed across psychology is that it rejects the commonly presupposed contrast between the factual realm and the psychological realm of attitudes and evaluations. Rather than seeing facts as marking the edge to psychological interest because they are simply

reflections of the way the world is we can see that this idea is, itself, part of a move in a social practice. The "out-there-ness," world-reflecting nature of facts is precisely what makes them powerful tools for doing particular actions. Moreover, the presence of factual versions in everyday discourse is by no means a sign that the charged world of human affairs is giving way to the cold logic of reality. On the contrary, reports, versions, and factual descriptions are often drawn on precisely when there is a sensitive or problematic issue at stake. Latour (1987) uses the example of scientific dispute to show that when disputation gets hot, description gets technical; we suggest the same is often true in everyday talk.

Perhaps the most immediate application of this model is to throw new light on the way in which activity is organized in institutional and semi-institutional settings. Our own most developed work with it has been on political controversies (Edwards & Potter, 1992a). However, we are starting to consider its utility in situations involving counseling, classroom management, and the interaction between social workers and clients. In these cases, the relatively stable and restricted constellations of stake and outcome provide a heuristic way in to analysis. Nevertheless, it will be important to explore the model in settings involving unconstrained everyday talk, which are, arguably, the most fundamental (see Heritage, 1984).

In our view, the most productive line of future development will involve studies of naturalistic records of interaction—people doing what they would normally do, which is captured on tape and subsequently transcribed. These allow the analyst to consider activities in their sequential context and, at the same time, they accommodate the subtlety of participants' orientations to stake and interest. We have already noted that we see severe problems in using content analytic techniques on such materials. We are also skeptical of the possibility of effective experiments: They are better suited to causal than to rhetorical relations, they tend to involve a considerable amount of pre-definition of categories, and they are arenas where it is difficult to duplicate the sorts of delicate interests that people orient to in everyday settings. This is not to say that inventive experimentation might not have a role in the development of theory in this area; however, we suspect it is more likely that the DAM model will be able to throw light on the operation of experiments than the other way round.

REFERENCES

Ashmore, M. (1989). *The reflexive thesis: Wrioting sociology of scientific knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Atkinson, J. M., & Heritage, J. (Eds.). (1984). *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Billig, M. (1987). *Arguing and thinking: A rhetorical approach to social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Billig, M. (1988). Rhetorical and historical aspects of attitudes: The case of the British monarchy. *Philosophical Psychology, 1*, 83-103.
- Billig, M. (1989). The argumentative nature of holding strong views: A case study. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 19*, 203-223.
- Billig, M. (1991). *Ideologies and opinions*. London: Sage.
- Billig, M. (1992). *Talking about the royal family*. London: Routledge.
- Billig, M., Condor, S., Edwards, D., Gane, M., Middleton, D. J., & Radley, A. R. (1988). *Ideological dilemmas: A social psychology of everyday thinking*. London: Sage.
- Bogen, D., & Lynch, M. (1989). Taking account of the hostile native: Plausible deniability and the production of conventional history in the Iran-Contra hearings. *Social Problems, 36*, 197-224.
- Clayman, S. E. (in press). Footing in the achievement of neutrality: The case of news interview discourse. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Talk at work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coulter, J. (1979). *The social construction of mind*. London: Macmillan.
- Coulter, J. (1989). *Mind in action*. Oxford: Polity.
- Coulter, J. (1991). Logic. In G. Button (Ed.), *Ethnomethodology and the human sciences* (pp. 20-51). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coulthard, M., & Montgomery, M. (Eds.). (1981). *Studies in discourse analysis*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Drew, P. (1984). Speakers' reportings in invitation sequences. In J. M. Atkinson & J. C. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 129-151). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Drew, P. (1990). Strategies in the contest between lawyers and witnesses. In J. N. Levi & A. G. Walker (Eds.), *Language in the judicial process* (pp. 39-64). New York: Plenum.
- Edwards, D. (1991). Categories are for talking: On the cognitive and discursive bases of categorization. *Theory and Psychology, 1*, 515-542.
- Edwards, D., Middleton, D., & Potter, J. (1992). Toward a discursive psychology of remembering. *The Psychologist, 15*, 441-446.
- Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992a). *Discursive psychology*. London: Sage.
- Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992b). The chancellor's memory: Rhetoric and truth in discursive remembering. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 6*, 187-215.
- Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (in press). Language and causation: A discursive action model of description and attribution. *Psychological Review*.
- Foucault, M. (1971). Orders of discourse. *Social Science Information, 10*, 7-30.
- Gergen, K. J. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist, 40*, 266-275.
- Gilbert, G. N., & Mulkay, M. (1984). *Opening pandora's box: A sociological analysis of scientists' discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1981). *Forms of talk*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harré, R. (1983). *Personal being: A theory for individual psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Heritage, J. (1984). *Garfinkel and ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Heritage, J. (1990-1991). Intention, meaning and strategy: Observations on constraints on interaction analysis. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 24*, 311-332.

- Heritage, J., & Watson, D. R. (1979). Formulations as conversational objects. In G. Psathas (Ed.), *Everyday language: Studies in ethnomethodology* (pp. 123-162). New York: Irvington.
- Jayyusi, L. (1984). *Categories and the moral order*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Kruglanski, A. (1990). Lay epistemic theory in social-cognitive psychology. *Psychological Inquiry, 1*, 202-246.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Latour, B. (1987). *Science in action*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levinson, S. C. (1988). Putting linguistics on a proper footing: Explorations in Goffman's concepts of participation. In P. Drew & A. Wootton (Eds.), *Erving Goffman: Studies in the interactional order* (pp. 161-227). Cambridge: Polity.
- Litton, I., & Potter, J. (1985). Social representations in the ordinary explanation of a "riot." *European Journal of Social Psychology, 15*, 371-388.
- Maynard, D. W. (1989). Perspective-display sequences in conversation. *Western Journal of Speech Communication, 53*, 91-113.
- Maynard, D. W. (1991). The perspective-display series and the delivery and receipt of diagnostic news. In D. Boden & D. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Talk and social structure* (pp. 164-192). London: Polity.
- Mills, C. W. (1940). Situated actions and vocabularies of motive. *American Sociological Review, 5*, 904-913.
- Moscovici, S. (1984). The phenomenon of social representations. In R. M. Farr & S. Moscovici (Eds.), *Social representations* (pp. 3-69). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Neisser, U. (1976). *Cognition and reality*. San Francisco: Freeman.
- Peräkylä, A., & Silverman, D. (1991). Owning experience: Describing the experience of other persons. *Text, 11*, 441-480.
- Pomerantz, A. (1980). Telling my side: "Limited access" as a fishing device. *Sociological Inquiry, 50*, 186-198.
- Pomerantz, A. (1984a). Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments: Some features of preferred/dispreferred turn shapes. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 57-101). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pomerantz, A. (1984b). Giving a source or basis: The practice in conversation of telling "how I know." *Journal of Pragmatics, 8*, 607-625.
- Pomerantz, A. (1987). Descriptions in legal settings. In G. Button & J.R.E. Lee (Eds.), *Talk and social organization* (pp. 226-243). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Popper, K. (1959). *The logic of scientific discovery*. London: Hutchinson.
- Potter, J., & Edwards, D. (1990). Nigel Lawson's tent: Discourse analysis, attribution theory and the social psychology of fact. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 20*, 40-24.
- Potter, J., & Halliday, Q. (1990). Community leaders as a device for warranting versions of crowd events. *Journal of Pragmatics, 14*, 725-741.
- Potter, J., & Reicher, S. (1987). Discourses of community and conflict: The organization of social categories in accounts of a "riot." *British Journal of Social Psychology, 26*, 25-40.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1988). Accomplishing attitudes: Fact and evaluation in racist discourse. *Text, 8*, 51-68.
- Sacks, H. (1974). On the analyzability of stories by children. In R. Turner (Ed.), *Ethnomethodology* (pp. 216-232). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Sacks, H. (1989). Lecture five: Suicide as a device for discovering if anybody cares. *Human Studies, 12*, 261-270.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1972). Notes on a conversational practice: Formulating place. In D. Sudnow (Ed.), *Studies in social interaction* (pp. 75-119). Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1988). Presequences and indirection: Applying speech act theory to ordinary conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics, 12*, 55-62.
- Shaver, K., G. (1983). *An introduction to attribution processes*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Smith, D. (1990). *Texts, facts and femininity: Exploring the relations of ruling*. London: Routledge.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1987). *Communicating racism: Ethnic prejudice in thought and talk*. London: Sage.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1992). Discourse and the denial of racism. *Discourse and Society, 3*, 87-118.
- van Dijk, T. A., & Kintch, W. (1983). *Strategies of discourse comprehension*. London: Academic Press.
- Watson, R. (1983). The presentation of victim and motive in discourse: The case of police interrogations and interviews. *Victimology, 8*, 31-52.
- Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1988). Discourse analysis and the identification of interpretative repertoires. In C. Antaki (Ed.), *Analysing everyday explanations: A casebook of methods* (pp. 168-183). London: Sage.
- Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1989). Narrative characters and accounting for violence. In J. Shotter & K. Gergen (Eds.), *Texts of identity* (pp. 206-219). London: Sage.
- Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1992). *Mapping the language of racism: Discourse and the legitimation of exploitation*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester/Wheatseaf.
- Wetherell, M., Stiven, H., & Potter, J. (1987). Unequal egalitarianism: A preliminary study of discourses concerning gender and employment opportunities. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 26*, 59-72.
- Whalen, M. R., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1990). Describing trouble: Practical epistemology in citizen calls to the police. *Language in Society, 19*, 465-492.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Woolfitt, R. C. (1990). On the analysis of interaction: An introduction to conversation analysis. In P. Luff, D. Frohlich, & G. N. Gilbert (Eds.), *Computers and conversation* (pp. 7-38). New York: Academic Press.
- Woolfitt, R. C. (1992). *Telling tales of the unexpected: The organization of factual accounts*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester/Wheatseaf.
- Woolgar, S. (1988). *Science: The very idea*. London: Tavistock.
- Wowk, M. (1984). Blame allocation: Sex and gender in a murder interrogation. *Women's Studies International Forum, 7*, 75-82.