

# Introduction to Organizational Discourse Analysis

Gail T. Fairhurst  
University of Cincinnati

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Session II



# Definitions

- ◆ Fairhurst & Putnam (1998): “**d**”
  - ◆ “the study of words and signifiers, including the form or structure of these words, the use of language in context, and the meanings or interpretations of discursive practices”
- ◆ European & Australasian Scholars: Foucault’s “**D**”
  - ◆ Systems of thought, assumptions, language, etc.
- ◆ Grant, Hardy & Putnam (2011):
  - ◆ “a broad class of approaches that focuses on the constitutive effects of language; processes of text production, distribution and consumption; and reflexive, interpretive analysis aimed at deciphering the role of discourse in a socially constructed reality”

# Texts

- ❖ Written documents to memory traces to verbal routines—all of which may be reconfigured through continued use (Derrida, 1988).
  - ❖ How do texts get created, used, and circulated?
- ❖ Discourses represent structured collections of texts.
- ❖ Discourses exist beyond any given text since they retain a generative capacity to source new texts and thus stand ready to layer and interweave with current practices, as situations demand.

# Just a method? No!

- ◆ ODA operates within a broad social constructionist epistemology
  - ◆ A perspective in its own right, one that gained significant momentum with the linguistic turn.
- ◆ ODA focuses on the discourse itself; that is, on how it is organized and what it is doing. Asking what discourse is *doing* is a very different theoretical question than focusing on how it *represents* ideas and objects.
- ◆ Theory-method pairings are not uncommon in organizational discourse analysis because it incorporates methodological concerns fundamental to its constructionist roots.
  - ◆ Types of data (e.g., meaning-centered), theoretical and analytical lens, actor/analyst reflexivity, and so on.

# 1. *How does discourse constitute the features of organizational life?*

- ◆ Features include identities, relationships, cultures, contexts, leadership, organizational units, and other phenomena
- ◆ Informed by social constructionism, ODA problematizes the taken-for-granted, including the very notion of the *organization* itself
- ◆ Primary issues concern agency, process, and possibility
  - ◆ The organizing potential of language and texts

# Interaction Data:

## Discourse Methods



# The Case of Katie Conway

- ◆ Female rookie (age 23) cop patrolling a bad neighborhood at 8:00 pm, Feb., 1998
- ◆ Assailant motions for her to pull over
- ◆ He shoots her 4 times with a .357 magnum, takes control of the cruiser
- ◆ As struggle ensues, she radios for help
- ◆ Eventually, she kills him with a bullet wound to the head
- ◆ 4 minute call to the dispatcher in the midst of the struggle as police supervisors frantically search for her vehicle (just prior to GPS)

# Different questions:

## Post-Positivist

- ◆ Cause-effect “Why?” questions (e.g., traits or predictors of leaders or followers and successful outcomes)

## Discourse

- ◆ *How is leadership ‘brought off’?*
- ◆ *What kind of leadership are we talking about?*

# Interaction Analysis

- How is control shared (or not)? Coding for one-up, one-down, one-across and forming “interacts”
- Three types of interacts: complementary, symmetrical, transitory ( $\uparrow\downarrow$ ,  $\uparrow\uparrow$ ,  $\rightarrow\rightarrow$  patterns over many such incidents)
- No one supervisor takes command; multiple supervisors almost in a rolling wave
- Dispatcher is the most frequent communicator, but consistently defers to police

# Conversation Analysis

- How do people use conversational methods and procedures to make sense of their worlds to one another?
- Turn-taking, membership categorization, accounting practices, and so on
- Effectiveness is gauged at the point Conway chooses HRO Discourse over victim Discourse
- Membership Categorization: ‘Distress.’ (line 24)

# Speech Act Analysis

- ◆ Focuses on the performative function of language (e.g., “I baptize you.”)
- ◆ Examines 5 categories of speech acts (e.g., assertives, declaratives, expressives, directives, commissives)
- ◆ Examines their episodic sequencing
- ◆ “Command presence” occurs with multi-functional “I’ll be there in 5 seconds...” (line 34)
- ◆ Episodic closure!

# Questions?

*How does discourse constitute the features of organizational life?*

*What organizing features make this an HRO?*

*What constitutes leadership in this situation?*

*Your questions?*



# Interview Data:

## Discourse Methods



# What if you had interview data on Katie Conway incident(s)?

- ◆ Maybe you are studying a *single event*, asking all of the actors to account for their actions during this time in follow-up interviews.
- ◆ Maybe you are able to get *many such interviews* of police rescues, and you want to study leadership issues (e.g., command presence), leader-member sensemaking processes during emergencies, organizational learning, and so on.
- ◆ Maybe you are able to *combine* interaction data with interview data through grounded theory methods.

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# What leadership Discourses might be operating?

- ◆ Heroic leadership discourse
- ◆ Collective leadership discourse
- ◆ Authoritarian discourse

*Key: Look for that ring of familiarity!*

*Discourses are repertoires (i.e., linguistic tool bags) of habitual forms of arguments, terminology, metaphors, styles, and so on.*

# What leadership Discourses might be operating?

- ◆ Heroic leadership discourse
  - ◆ “If I was the **hero** today, so be it. I was willing to do **whatever it took** to save her life. That’s **who I am**.”
- ◆ Collective leadership discourse
  - ◆ “It was a **team effort**. I was just in the **right spot at the right time**. We train very hard for these situations, and we all have to pull together for **our common goals**.”
- ◆ Authoritarian discourse
  - ◆ “I’m always very much **in control** in these situations, and I regard it paramount that **I maintain a strict sense of order** on scene.”

# Questions?

*How can you tell when a Discourse surfaces in interview (or interaction) data?*

*Can more than one Discourse appear in such data?*



# Using Interviews to Study Tensions and Contradictions

- ◆ Clash of Discourses generates tension, contradiction, paradox
- ◆ Again, Discourses are repertoires (i.e., linguistic tool bags) of habitual forms of arguments, terminology, metaphors, story themes, and so on
- ◆ Tensions are generated when actors select from competing repertoires/Discourses when communicating

# What might this look like with Katie Conway?

## Discourse of Victimhood

- Pleas for help
- Extreme emotional displays
- Expressions of suffering
- Identification of inflicted injuries

## Discourse of Police Emergencies

- Requests for help using police jargon and protocol
- Routinization of emotion
- Attention to authority
- Use of message redundancy for officers not co-present

# What Discourse is operating here? Looking for that “ring of familiarity”

Interview question: Why didn't Conway use police jargon from the start?

Interviewee: She was fighting for her life! She had just been shot four times with a .357 magnum. Wrestling with her assailant, bleeding out, and calling dispatch were probably all she could manage. Plus she was probably worried about going into shock.

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*Victim Discourse*

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Interview question: Why didn't Conway use police jargon from the start?

Interviewee: I'm sure she would have if she could. She was trained to do this, and her life depended on it. The sooner she can collect her wits, the better. We're trained to routinize emergencies. That may sound cruel, but it's the only way to get the necessary help in time to manage a crisis.

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***Police Emergency Discourse***

# What tensions might these two Discourses generate?

## Discourse of Victimhood

- ◆ Individual
- ◆ Emotion
- ◆ Chaotic

## Discourse of Police Emergencies

- ◆ Collective
- ◆ Rationality
- ◆ Organized

# How do tensions get managed?

- ❖ **Simple contradiction?** (Either-Or: one Discourse or the other)
  - ❖ “You have to choose in that situation. Are you going to be a police officer and live **or** die a victim?”
- ❖ **Ambidexterity?** (Both-And: both Discourses are held in tension with one another)
  - ❖ “I give Conway credit. She was holding it together bleeding out **and** still she managed her own emergency. Kudos to her.”
- ❖ **Impossible Choice?** (Neither Discourse is viable: ‘Damned if you do, damned if you don’t’)
  - ❖ “She’s a woman and a rookie, what do you expect?”

# What local logics might these two Discourses generate?

## Discourse of Victimhood

- “To hell with protocol if fighting for your life”

## Discourse of Police Emergencies

- “Protocol will save your life the sooner you can use it”

# Questions?

*How does one recognize a Discourse in interview talk?*

*How do Discourses generate tension, contradiction, or paradox?*

*Your questions?*



# Thorny Leadership Issues and ODA

- ❖ *Who* is defining leadership?
  - ❖ Discursive approaches typically do not start out with specific theories of leadership prior to data analysis.
  - ❖ Stronger links between leadership and organizing?
- ❖ *How* should we define leadership?
  - ❖ Role-based?
  - ❖ Mobilizing achievement?
  - ❖ Power and influence language games?
  - ❖ Attribution?

# Thorny Leadership Issues

- ❖ Can you combine discursive approaches with other kinds of data, including quantitative data?
  - ❖ Paradigms as discourses (Deetz, 1996, *Organization Science*)
  - ❖ What do we see, think, and talk about with a Discourse that is:
    - ❖ Post-positivist?
    - ❖ Interpretive?
    - ❖ Critical Discourse?
    - ❖ Postmodern Discourse?
- ❖ The “true science” problem

# Questions?

