

# 38 Discourse and Sociology: Sociology and Discourse

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## 0 Introduction

In 1946 I took an introductory chemistry course in a highly regarded engineering school. During the following 13 years I took degrees in anthropology and sociology. I have had little to do with chemistry in the half century since I took the course; I have spent the past four decades deeply involved in teaching and research on society with a particular focus, for more than 30 years, on language in use in social contexts.

In the spring of 1998 I went to hear a chemist colleague deliver a distinguished research lecture on laser analyses of molecular structure. It was fascinating, as is the work of other chemist colleagues in a range of specialties in their discipline. Some social research is also fascinating and “relevant.” The difference between chemistry (and *some* of the other physical sciences) and social science disciplines is that most of the topics of interest, questions asked, and methods of contemporary chemistries were seldom even vaguely adumbrated in the text and lectures of my introductory course while *most* concerns, questions, and methods of the social sciences were well limned half a century ago.

### 0.1 *Language in sociology*

One possible exception to this observation is that of language (discourse, written and spoken discourse, talk, conversation, and so on) and social life (micro and macro, social structure, social organization, social interaction, and so on); this has been a recent development. While a diverse set of scholars, ranging from the Russian psychologist Vygotsky, studying language acquisition, to a heterogeneous swarm of philosophers of language from Austin to Voloshinov and Wittgenstein, commented on issues of language in society, older readers of this chapter know that attention to language *by sociologists* was modest indeed as recently as the late 1940s. Among disciplinary founders, Durkheim and Weber had little to say about language. Pareto was interested in a range of issues from ambiguity and argument to a Whorfian-like

social semantics to language and ideology; his work never attracted much of a following among sociologists. Simmel addressed issues relating to the management of interaction in everyday life, including matters having to do with written and spoken text as interactional resources. Sociologists as early as the 1920s were reading his work; none followed up what would now be seen as sociolinguistic implications. After World War II sociology graduate students in the United States were told about, and in some departments read, Cooley, Dewey, and Mead. The focus was on social psychological issues of self, role, individual, and interaction, but *not* on the part played by language. Most American sociological theorists in the years following World War II were little more interested. Merton, Parsons, Sorokin, and their contemporaries seldom attended to language matters at either the micro- or macrolevels (Parsons did say in 1951 that language is a societal prerequisite). Among sociologists read by most Americans, only Erving Goffman foregrounded language and talk in the early post-war decades. Few sociologists heard of Alfred Schutz, fewer read his work. As recently as the early 1970s there were only two journals specializing on topics considered in this *Handbook*, and anthologies, monographs, and texts numbered in the low hundreds.<sup>1</sup>

There has been a sea change in sociological attention to language since the 1940s. Proportionately far more sociologists are attending to language than were in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.<sup>2</sup> Almost any sociologist's list of influential living theorists would include at least a few from a longer roll including Bourdieu, Collins, Garfinkel, Giddens, Habermas, and Latour – all of whom accord central importance to considerations of language in use in social contexts.<sup>3</sup> Dozens of journals publish hundreds of articles exploring the interrelationships of language and social structures and behaviors. Dozens of handbooks and encyclopedias provide summaries of these articles and additional hundreds of monographs. This great richness notwithstanding, Russell's (1979) characterization remains apposite:

Psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and linguists have advanced the study of discourse without the common descriptive terminology, without the shared theoretical or methodological predilections, and without the set of paradigmatic studies around which a unified and cumulative body of knowledge can be constructed. Proliferation of contrasting paradigms in each of the above mentioned disciplines renders the possibility of a comprehensive (and unifying) theory of language extremely remote. (1979)

I do not claim that a unified theory of language in society is imminent; I *will* note below what I consider to be some encouraging/promising developments.

Changes in chemistry and other natural sciences have resulted in part from the discovery of tiny particles and DNA strings and of such astronomical phenomena or possibilities as black holes, quasars, and false vacuums, through a combination of ever-improving instrumentation and imaginative theorizing.<sup>4</sup> In the case of language and society the phenomena of interest have always been accessible; they were, until recently, overlooked.<sup>5</sup> While foundational pieces on humans and language in society began to appear in English in the mid-1960s (e.g. Berger and Luckmann, Cicourel, Garfinkel, and Schutz, with Chomsky's *Aspects* appearing in 1965) and Foucault and Habermas translations early in the following decade, it is my belief that the

emergence of the reciprocal interests of my title have resulted as much from demonstration to sociologists of the value of linguistic knowledge and language data (discourse) for sociology, and of sociological knowledge and data for students of language in use, as from direct exposure to these rich but often difficult theorists and philosophers of language.

I have room for no more than a personal sampling of work bearing on discourse–sociology relationships which I have found to be thoughtful and provocative.<sup>6</sup> I begin with an illustration drawn from Urban’s work (1991, 1996), employing a “discourse-centered approach to culture” (DCAC), of how ways of talking in a society simultaneously reflect, constitute, and reproduce social organization (including kin relationships), cultural beliefs (including mythology), and norms about everyday living (including those regarding gender relations). I next illustrate how discourse illumines social processes, focusing particularly on the talk of social conflict. I continue with sketches of a sampling of studies of discourse in institutional settings (medical, public, and business) that illumine issues of long-standing sociological concern.<sup>7</sup> I conclude with very brief mention of some unattended questions and demonstrations.

## 1 Discourse-centered Approach to Culture: An Illustration

Perhaps the most important reason that sociologists and other students of society historically did not attend to language phenomena has been that these phenomena are so central to our lives that we notice them only when they become in some way problematic; for example, through failing hearing, or for American English monolinguals through situations which require coping with other languages. Actually, of course, far more is involved in cross-cultural “coping” than differences in language itself; *Weltanschauung* and perceptual frames may so vary that even with “accurate” translations another culture may be baffling indeed. The following illustrations from Urban’s own work and from a range of other apparently quite different researches hopefully provide partial demonstration and some illumination of these complexities.

Urban begins his 1991 book about a small Indian group in Brazil by declaring, “The DCAC is founded on a single proposition: that culture is localized in concrete, publicly accessible signs, the most important of which are actually occurring instances of discourse” (1991: 1); he has published two books dedicated to elucidation/demonstration of this perspective.

Depending upon context, interlocutors, and audiences, English speakers may have a wide variety of collectivities in mind when employing first person plural pronouns (nonexhaustively: age cohort, ethnic group, gender, nationality, political party, religion: I have shown elsewhere (1994) how the ambiguity of pronominal reference in English can be used to manipulate group boundaries). Urban (1996) asserts that “his” people<sup>8</sup> typically use few first person plural pronouns, but that when they do, they use them to make a distinction between “we the living” and “they the dead,” and not for the sorts of collections named above. Nor, Urban claims, do these people reference kin in terms of some standardized set of kin terms which reference biological relationships. Rather they draw on a collection of kin terms whose meaning

in specific talk is revealed by the ways in which contexting discourse is employed in talking about *relationships*. Urban argues that perceptions are shaped by discourse and, specifically, by discourse that maximally circulates publicly. Nothing terribly controversial in such an observation. But Urban goes on to claim that “to keep discourse circulating at P.I. Ibirama, you must avoid disputable referential content” and “make sure that it cannot be contradicted by immediate experience” (1996: 87). Such a world of discourse is one quite different from that with which we are familiar; and quite different too in behavioral consequences. Urban is not propounding some naive Sapir-Whorfianism. He is demonstrating that differences in discursive practices generate truly different world views and perceptual and interpretive frames. Table 38.1

**Table 38.1** Some possible/imagined relationships between discourse/talk and perceptions of the world: Shokleng (P.I. Ibirama) and mother-tongue English-speaking North Americans

<i>Shokleng</i>		<i>USA English</i>	
<i>Features of discourse/talk</i>	<i>World view</i>	<i>Features of discourse/talk</i>	<i>World view</i>
Personal pronoun avoidance	Collective as contrasted to individual identity	Widespread use of personal pronouns/ referential ambiguity	Individuation of self
We–they used for alive–dead distinction	Continuity/ sharing rather than difference/ differentiation	We–they for multiple memberships	Recognition of social heterogeneity
Careful formulation of talk to avoid exposure to contradiction from hearers	Blurring of biological kin relations – foregrounding of ceremonial (fictive) and socially recognized relationships	Frequent challenge of facts, opinions	Emphasis on empirical accuracy – believability <i>or</i> obfuscation <i>or</i> recognition of speaker challengeability
Eschewing of personal narrative(s)	The world is stable	Personal narrative salient	Foregrounding of cause–effect relations/ recognition of continuity with change
Mode of learning origin myths	Truncation of temporal axis/ history repeats itself	Constant decentering of text	Nothing is as it appears

suggests some contrasts between Shokleng and English-speaking North Americans in perceptions of the world – and the rootedness of those perceptions in discourse practices.

### *1.1 Different theories for differing discourse*

Consider an example closer to home. People attentive to talk would not argue nowadays that there are no differences between the ways men and women talk in contemporary American society. It is indisputable, moreover, that women in American society are relatively disadvantaged compared to men. What *is* in dispute is whether gender differences in discourse are best explained as resulting from differences in male and female *culture* (as Tannen 1992 uses the term) or from differences in male and female *power* (Troemel-Ploetz 1991; see also Thorne and Henley 1975; Thorne et al. 1983). Troemel-Ploetz appears to believe that men (specifically middle-class white American males) act and talk with the end of domination (or accommodating to the greater power of other males) and are not interested in more successful cross-gender communication – females can just accommodate. Tannen agrees that power and domination are important considerations in all talk but argues that problems in cross-gender communication occur because of differences in the very understanding of what talk is all about, such that, for example, even males wanting to be supportive when females express discomfort simply do not know how (i.e. males give suggestions about what to do while women want to be told that what has happened or is happening is really a bad thing).

Urban's view is more complex. According to the DCAC perspective, if people are exposed to the same discourses, they ought to have the possibility of abstracting from those discourses/signs a shared framework. His explanation for continuing difficulties in cross-gender communication stems from the conclusion – based on the circulation notion – that there must *not* be wholly shared access to public signs, that there must be some measure of differential circulation among men and women, out of which the social organizational difference is precipitated. In short, differential circulation of discourse within a larger community of more or less shared public signs leads to crystallization of the social categories of “men” and “women.” Urban suggests that the “power” solution only displaces the problem from the level of circulation (its empirical locus) and gives the false image that the asymmetry exists outside of circulatory processes, and, moreover, is probably immutable. He finds such a view wrong and cites major shifts in the US since the 1960s as evidence of changes in social organization and concomitant circulatory patterns – with the former perhaps being a consequence of the latter.

Tannen's view of cross-gender discourse differences is consonant with Urban's DCAC and differences of Brazilian Indian culture and discourse from that of the North American English of both men and women. Urban foregrounds the importance of public circulation of discourse. Troemel-Ploetz issues a call to the gender barricades. The implications for differently understanding relations between discourse and social organization are immense.

## 1.2 *Different modes, codes, ways of talking, and so on, within languages/cultures*

Many sociologists and linguists now share quite sophisticated awareness of class and regional dialectal differences in speech; there is increasing attention to differences in opportunities which often accompany those in speech production. More importantly for present purposes, scholars in several disciplines have identified distinctions in discourse fairly directly related to immediate interactional outcomes and, perhaps, to cultural reproduction as well. Space permits only brief mention of some categorizations which help in understanding discourse in society.

In the late 1950s Bernstein<sup>9</sup> began to publish papers on differences in educational and familial discourse as shaped by social class in England. Over the next 30 years or so he addressed more and more encompassing themes beginning with a public-formal language distinction which evolved into his well-known (but less understood) elaborated and restricted codes (less and more context-dependent utterances, respectively), to classification and frame as modes of organizing knowledge, to, ultimately, issues of the very reproduction of society and culture. Bernstein came to argue that realizations of elaborated and restricted code manifested in specific texts (speech utterances) are simultaneously: (1) the *result* of the location of specific social actors with reference to class (and therefore to different “control modes”) and practices of agencies of transmission, and (2) a *basis* for maintenance of class (and privilege) through symbolic differentiation in thought ways and *Weltanschauung* (Bernstein uses the term “mental structures”). It could be argued that such a perspective is not incompatible with DCAC.<sup>10</sup>

In the mid-1970s Lakoff (1975) identified differences between men’s and women’s talk, which came to be labeled “powerful” and “powerless” speech and initiated disputes over interpretation and implied tactics, which continue (see above). Then O’Barr (1982) and his associates discovered that many of the differences identified were isomorphic to those between the courtroom speech of witnesses of different social class and education, which generated differences in credibility such that, for example, hesitancy or hedging or other manifestations of uncertainty are seen as indicators that witness evidence is less trustworthy. O’Barr’s findings are again compatible with Urban’s DCAC – they further underline the critical importance of context in influencing both the production and interpretation of speech.

## 1.3 *Intratextual difference, multivocality, entextualization, decentering*

I have been talking about how differences in discourse in use across different societies/cultures and in different subcultures within societies/cultures result in differences in societal features as wide-ranging as collective identity (who is “we”), gender-related self-esteem, and maintenance of class privilege. Another group of scholars has been looking not at different texts in different contexts but at differences (in several senses) of “*same*” texts.

Silverman and Torode (1980) organize their approach to text analysis around three polarities: (1) "appearance–reality" as manifested in actual texts;<sup>11</sup> (2) what theorists of language say and actually do *in their own texts*, and; (3) "interpretation versus interruption" as modes of textual analysis. Interruption denies the "conventional assertion" of the neutrality of language in use; it attempts by "political intervention" to make explicit the "political choices" which are made in using language. Most discourse – whether in everyday interaction, fiction, or scholarship – takes for granted such epistemological assumptions as subject–object relations and linear causality. Interruption of discourse can provide access to the "reality" referenced by "appearances." Identification of multiple "voices" is one result of interruption; attention to multivocality has implications for highly productive theoretical developments in linguistics (inter alia, problems of reference, coreference, referential ambiguity, and textual cohesion), sociology (inter alia, role, reference groups, self, and identity), and sociolinguistics, especially pragmatics and issues of multifunctionality in utterances. Silverman and Torode focus especially on theorists of language,<sup>12</sup> but they also comment on the work of students of talk, including Labov and Sacks – and Kafka. Any social actor (or analyst) who asks "what is meant by what is being said" (Cicourel 1974; Grimshaw 1989; Labov and Fanshel 1977) or who is interested in how text is related to social organization or ideology may well end up "interrupting."

A second variety of difference in sameness is that examined by Silverstein and Urban and their colleagues (1996) in their practice of what has come to be labeled "decentering of text." Some of what "decenterers" do is very much like the "interruption" of Silverman and Torode. A deeply interesting dimension is added, however, by scrutiny of a "same" text in different manifestations; for example, an original oral rendition, electronic recording, phonetic transcription, transcription in original language and in translation. Consider, further, these different renditions incorporated in one or both languages into oral scholarly presentations, scholarly and popular papers, presentation to the original informant or performer, or whatever. The meaning of such a text, as perceived by both emitters and audiences, will be influenced by a host of variables including contexts of text and of situation (as conceptualized by, e.g., Cicourel 1994; Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Halliday and Hasan 1989; Hymes' SPEAKING heuristic 1974) and others, from Collins's (1981) "irreducible macrofactors" (for present purposes (1) the dispersion of individuals in physical *space*, (2) the amount of *time* that social processes take, and (3) the *numbers* of individuals involved *and* Collins's argument that people are all participants in chains of interaction in which, in every situation, interactional resources are gained, maintained, or lost) to Goffman's participation statuses (1974). Contemplate how different history would have been and how different our world, absent certain discourses, *or* with different readings/interpretations of discourses which have occurred. Consider how carefully lawyers study contracts looking for possible variant interpretations – or diplomats and the military study treaties, or critics prose and poetry. Consider further again the complexities added when contracts or treaties are intended to regulate behaviors of parties of different languages/cultures<sup>13</sup> or critics to assess productions in translation, or, still further, when notes employed in generating the several varieties of texts are available for use in the search for meaning(s). The value of discourse for understanding society and vice versa is evident.

## 2 Discourse and Social Processes – Discourse in Social Process

Most non-language-oriented sociologists asked about possible usefulness of language data would probably suggest not revelation of cultural differences through discourse (see above) or substantive illumination of institutions/organizations (see below) but investigation of face-to-face interaction.<sup>14</sup> Such research is important and increasingly visible, in the now generally recognized specialty of conversation analysis (CA), in interdisciplinary study of discourse associated with specific social processes such as social conflict or negotiation, and in research directed to specification of “interactional moves” in ongoing interaction. CA is discussed elsewhere (see Schegloff, this volume); I here briefly mention propositional studies of conflict talk.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.1 *Immersion, {multiple/serial} cases, verstehen: exploratory, summary, and testable propositions*

Persuasive and compelling dramatic and other fictional renderings of the discourse of conflict have been around for millennia. While there are long traditions of research on social conflict (and other social processes), until fairly recently scholarly attention to what is *said* in conflictful interaction has been modest (there *were* studies of written diplomatic exchanges in periods leading up to war). As recently as 1983 Goldman critically remarked the absence of “even *one* complete dispute transcript”;<sup>16</sup> in the years since, hundreds of audio-, film, and videorecordings and transcriptions of these records (at least some of them “complete” – whatever that may mean)<sup>17</sup> have been published and/or archived in equal numbers of articles, chapters in collections, and individual monographs (see, illustratively, references in Brenneis, 1988; Grimshaw, 1990a).

There are hundreds of propositional statements about social conflict; they vary very considerably in scope, specificity, elegance, and rigor of formulation, are drawn from both contemporary and historical case studies, experiments, and statistical analyses, and are informed by perspectives from all the social and clinical sciences as well as the humanities (again illustratively, see Coser 1956; Dahrendorf 1957; Mack and Snyder 1957; Williams 1947). Similar distillation has not been attempted with studies of conflict talk; I believe formulation of summary and, ultimately, testable propositions is a feasible and potentially highly productive enterprise.

I can here illustrate only instances of discourse rules, propositions, and testable propositions or hypotheses (the following discussion draws heavily on chapter 13 of my 1990).

#### 2.1.1 *Discourse/(conversational, interactional) rules*

Labov and Fanshel (1977, henceforward LF) formulate their discourse rules as “if . . . then” propositions. Many disputes include assignment of blame or responsibility (see especially Fillmore 1971). A discourse rule for this behavior might look like the following:

01. *Rule for assigning blame (responsibility).*<sup>18</sup> If A asserts B should and could have performed a behavior  $X_1$ , but wilfully did not, or that he should and could have avoided performing a behavior  $X_2$ , but nonetheless wilfully performed it, then A is heard as blaming B for the non-occurrence or occurrence of  $X_1$  or  $X_2$  respectively.

### 2.1.2 *Observational propositions or postulates*

In 1989 I formulated a set of summary propositions or postulates about how the sociological variables of (1) relations of power and (2) of affect and (3) outcome characteristics influence (determine would be too strong; there are, for example, important contextual constraints) choice of ways of talking to get things socially accomplished. Analogous rules about conflict talk might look like the following (adapted from Grimshaw 1990b):

02. Probability of an initial move varies directly with a potential initiator's perception of his or her stake in a possible outcome and with the initiator's power relative to that of a potential opponent;

03. The "taking up" of an oppositional move (i.e. occurrence of conflict talk) varies directly with an offended party's perception of her or his stake in a possible outcome and with the party's power relative to that of the offending party;

...

06. Within the range of conflict-talk modes available because of power considerations, specific selection is constrained by the interaction of relations of affect, perceived stakes, likely third party (audience) reactions, and so on.

### 2.1.3 *Testable propositions/(hypotheses?)*

Such (and further) specification of observations<sup>19</sup> allows formulation of testable propositions like the following:

07. A will not attempt to avoid a dispute (or need to) if A has the power to overcome B *and* is willing to risk generation of negative affect (in self, in B, in self-B relations, or possibly in other interactants or bystanders).

Successful verification or falsification of propositions about conflict (or other varieties of) talk and establishment of links among validated propositions are steps toward theory construction and an ultimate goal of what Hymes (1974) has called a "unified/[integrated] theory of sociolinguistic description."<sup>20</sup>

## 3 **What about Paradigms? Now? Soon? Ever?**

As I observed earlier, I do not believe it can be said that the massive increase in attention to language matters by sociologists and other social scientists in recent years either constitutes or reflects a new paradigm in the social sciences. Indeed, I am not at all certain that there *are* either dominant or competing paradigms in the social sciences (it might be argued that social psychological and social structural perspectives are such competing paradigms). To a very substantial extent, what seems to go on in

social behavioral studies and specifically in work on language in use in social contexts seems closer to what Kuhn could have characterized as “pre normal science” (*not* his term):

In the absence of a paradigm or some candidate for paradigm, all of the facts that could possibly pertain to the development of a given science are likely to seem equally relevant. As a result, early fact-gathering is a far more nearly random activity than the one subsequent scientific development makes familiar. Furthermore, in the absence of a reason for seeking some particular form of more recondite information, early fact-gathering is usually restricted to the wealth of data that lie close to hand. (1970: 15)<sup>21</sup>

There is no dearth of theoretical perspectives on language in use in social contexts. Heuristics (e.g. Hymes’s 1974 SPEAKING acronym), proto theories (e.g. Garfinkel’s 1967 original ethnomethodology), theories of the middle range (e.g. the Bourdieu–Bernstein conceptualization of cultural reproduction, Brown and Levinson’s 1978 on politeness phenomena, or Cicourel’s 1974 cognitive sociology), and sensitizing perspectives (e.g. Gumperz’s 1982 interpretive sociolinguistics, sometimes also called interactional sociolinguistics or referred to as the theory of conversational inference – see Gumperz, this volume; Gumperz and Hymes’s 1972 ethnography of speaking) abound.<sup>22</sup> However, while many articles and monographs informed by one or another or several of these orientations are published, many (perhaps most) publications on discourse and society consist not of the testing and extension of theories or of paradigms but rather of observation, description, and documentation of constituent elements of talk as employed in social interaction. I believe much study of discourse has not progressed beyond collection and classification of interesting specimens (I hasten to acknowledge that such collection and classification lie at the foundation of all theoretical work).

I devote my remaining space to three promising exceptions,<sup>23</sup> namely, (1) employ of comprehensive discourse analysis (CDA) in study of interactional accomplishment in ongoing conversational discourse, (2) study of narrative and employ of text analysis more generally to study stability, conflict, and change in cultural, economic, political, and social institutions, and (3) demonstration of the value of Collins’s formulation of “micro foundations of macro sociology” through intensive examination of discourse within business organizations.

### 3.1 *Comprehensive discourse analysis*

Immediately after the pessimistic portrayal of prospects for a comprehensive and unifying theory of language in society cited above (section 0.1), Russell continues with the following characterization of Labov and Fanshel’s (LF) *Therapeutic Discourse*:

Amidst such diversity, points of theoretical convergence are sufficiently rare, or abstract, or short-lived to seriously deter sustained empirical applications. One would not expect a meticulous empirical investigation of fifteen minutes of discourse to provocatively engage, not only the specific theoretical propositions with which it is motivated, but approaches to discourse analysis and interpretation that have little

more in common than their avowed concern with linguistic performance. . . . LF is just such a work. (1979: 176)

While both predecessors and followers of LF have looked at conversation in its social context(s), LF differ in the explicitness with which they foreground their concern to extend the scope of linguistic analysis to conversation as a whole (i.e. being “accountable to an entire body of conversation, attempting to account for interpretations of all utterances and the coherent sequencing between them” (Labov and Fanshel 1977: 354)). Their ambitious agenda includes apprehending the relation between what is said and what is meant *and* how things get socially accomplished with talk. In the course of this project LF found themselves involved in ever-evolving editing of their target text as they attended to fields of discourse, paralinguistic cues (including “key”), knowledge shared by interactants, sequencing, and so on, in order to identify expansions of text (what is “actually” being said/meant), propositions (recurrent communications), rules of discourse, and interactional moves. LF generated an array of innovative and well-honed methodological conceptualizations, clear specification of risks of their approach, and a clearer understanding of what gets done in the therapeutic interview *and* demonstration of how that done is socially accomplished than had been previously available.

LF recognized that similar studies of other types of conversations would necessarily antecede efforts at constructing a unified theory of conversational description. Such studies consume prodigious amounts of time and energy – my four studies<sup>24</sup> of a 12-minute sound–image record of three to five participants involved in a dissertation defense engaged me for more than ten years;<sup>25</sup> few (if any) other investigators have taken up LF’s challenge. My CDA studies of the dissertation defense allowed me to both (1) promulgate *sociological* propositions about processes of social evaluation, conflict talk, and social boundary work and about communicative nonsuccess, and (2) identify sociological *constraints* on language in use in social contexts. CDA remains an unexploited richness.

### 3.2 *Narrative and textual analysis*<sup>26</sup>

Since its original publication in 1967 Labov and Waletzky’s (1997, hereafter LW) specification of the structure of narrative has been both inspiration and guide for investigators from across a range of disciplines; the more than 50 authors who contributed to Bamberg’s (1997) volume on the impact of LW across the intervening years represent linguistics and language and literature programs as well as those in psychology, the social sciences, and special programs ranging from child development to ethnic studies (see Johnstone, this volume). This broad appeal and influence notwithstanding, Labov wrote (in his contribution to the anniversary volume):

The discussion of narrative and other speech events at the discourse level rarely allows us to prove anything. It is essentially a hermeneutic study, in which continued engagement with the discourse as it was delivered gains entrance to the perspective of the speaker and the audience, tracing the transfer of information and experience in a way that deepens our own understanding of what language and social life are all about. (1997: 396)

I believe that the following examples demonstrate that Labov has been too modest.

Two principal motivations driving the development of CDA were Fanshel's concern to better understand and thereby to improve what goes on in therapeutic interviews, and Labov's to better understand conversation. Lyotard's (1984; see also Jameson 1984) motivation to develop a theory (philosophy?) of narrative sprang in part from his dissatisfaction with contemporary views on "legitimation," "paradigm," "postmodernism," "science," "truth and falsity," and a bundle of more and less closely related emergent and redefined concepts. His aim is to investigate the nature of postmodern knowledge, the bases of assertion of priority in claims of legitimacy of science, logic, and narrative, and the somewhat antinomian employ of narrative in popularizing science, and to raise a variety of interesting questions relating to different varieties of training (with unmentioned implications for Bernstein's (*passim*) elaborated and restricted codes and classification and framing of knowledge) and the nature of universities.

Lyotard invokes real-world cases only anecdotally.<sup>27</sup> Barbara Czarniawska and Bruno Latour, in contrast, have quite different conceptualizations of narrative and of its usefulness in social analysis, but are alike in that they focus heavily on empirical cases.

Czarniawska (1997)<sup>28</sup> bases her analyses on discourse materials produced in and about Swedish public organizations, including inter alia: (1) autobiographies and biographies, (2) speeches of varying levels of formality, (3) conversations, (4) interviews, (5) bureaucratic memos, (6) annual reports, (7) budgets, and (8) media coverage. She seeks to demonstrate a central descriptive and analytic role, *for the study of organizations*, of stories/narratives and a dramaturgical perspective. She does this via depoliticization of Lyotard and employ of resources of anthropology, literary theory, and the institutional school within sociology. Change is a major focus for Czarniawska and she demonstrates nicely how *stories*, *themes*, and *serials* can be employed to elucidate the role of "good" and "bad" friction in social change, how new and old ways of acting have been integrated, and how new processes of "companyization" and "computerization" change the workplaces of individuals as well as the larger bureaucratic landscape. In her 1999 study Czarniawska pursues her interest in organization by investigating organizational theory as a literary genre.

Latour focuses not on narratives produced by organizational members and others who have stakes in an organization's performance, which themselves constitute data for the study of those organizations, but, rather, on narratives about events and "actants" (see Linde, this volume).<sup>29</sup> His Actant Network Theory posits outcomes which result from interaction of a sweeping range of "things," including human actors, machines, and fiscal structures (see n. 29). In his study/story about a failed technological project called Aramis (Latour 1996b; see also Laurier and Philo 1999), intended to provide a massively innovative and efficient modern mass transport system for Paris, Latour collects data similar to that employed by Czarniawska but uses it to demonstrate how, among other things, Aramis itself became a player with goals and aspirations, subject to disappointment, and even deliberately resisting behaviors of other participants (including human ones). In an earlier study of Pasteur's work on lactic acid (1992), Latour demonstrated how a literary perspective on scientific texts can illuminate in new ways issues which are at the heart of sociological concern in *that* variety of interaction between human and nonhuman "actants." While I am sufficiently traditional to be skeptical indeed about the notion of nonhuman

actants being volitional and able to experience emotions (note again Latour's denial that such ascription is metaphorical), it is hard to deny that behavior involving the sort of actants he identified (note 29) can be compellingly engrossing.<sup>30</sup>

Studies focused on other varieties of narratives have pursued different analytic and theoretical ends. Agar (e.g. 1980; Agar and Hobbs 1982) looked at an extensive life history of a heroin addict, with, amongst others, ends of identifying themes and stories, cultural and subcultural knowledge required to understand life histories, and life histories as careers. More recently (1997), Ries collected conversational narratives about economic catastrophes and food and commodity shortages and strategies in Perestroika-era Moscow, with an end to portraying a Russian (Moscow) culture of complaint, disappointment, and resignation.<sup>31</sup> With only occasional exceptions (e.g. Czarniawska 1997: 145ff); these authors' analyses of discourse material are very different from the CDA of LF or the CA-influenced project of Boden described immediately below; all demonstrate persuasively the value of discourse (and specifically of narrative) in investigation of sociological questions – and of sociological theory in elucidating meanings of discourse.

### 3.3 *Microfoundations and institutional stability and change*

In the late 1960s I had a continuing argument with Harvey Sacks and his conversation analysis (CA) associates. I told them I found their work highly original, exciting, and of great potential value to sociology, and urged them to integrate CA methods and concepts into more traditional sociology – simultaneously showing how traditional sociological concepts and perspectives could help in interpreting CA findings. Sacks's response was that he *was* doing sociology, that what I wanted him to do was not relevant to *his* sociology, and that sooner or later all but the most stubborn of the rest of us would come to accept his vision.

Increasing numbers of researchers across the social sciences (and the humanities) have come to value CA as an approach to everyday talk; only recently has a CA-trained sociologist undertaken to *demonstrate* the value of talk as data for studying fundamental sociological questions such as how social organization is constituted, reproduced, and modified – and how members contribute to that constitution, reproduction and modification through talk – in what may appear to be singularly mundane and unremarkable interaction. Boden (1994),<sup>32</sup> like Czarniawska, studies organizations; her interest similarly is to demonstrate the centrality of spoken and written discourse in organizational life. Some of her data are the same; not her analyses.<sup>33</sup>

Boden's demonstration is persuasive. Using audiorecorded talk from telephone calls and meetings of varying levels of formality, collected in organizations ranging from a travel agency and a local television station through hospitals and a university administrative department to the Oval Office, Boden shares with her readers her understanding of the (sometimes) extraordinarily delicate but analytically identifiable ways in which talk is employed to “inform, amuse, update, gossip, review, reassess, reason, instruct, revise, argue, debate, contest, and actually *constitute* the moments, myths and, through time, the very *structuring* of [the] organization” (1994: 8; cf. LF on interactional terms). The dawning awareness of an accountant that physicians in different departments might differently view policy change that could improve a

hospital's overall revenue position but reduce "their" money (1994: 58ff) is a nice case in point.<sup>34</sup>

Boden shows how members of organizations can at the same time account for their behaviors in terms of a "rational actor" model and be unaware of how actual decision-making is accomplished incrementally, in fragments of unremembered and individually unremarkable chat, rather than by focused weighing of "rational" considerations. Boden simultaneously shows how concurrent and articulated employ of the previously segregated conceptual apparatuses of general sociology and of CA (e.g. adjacency organization, agenda, bracketing, placement, sequence (*centrally and critically*), turn, and so on) is mutually enhancing. Boden argues that stages of (1) collection of actual talk, (2) identification of sequentiality in that talk, and (3) discovery in the talk and its sequentiality of the fundamental stuff and fundamentals of organization (4) allow/contribute to sociological theory at levels of considerable abstractness (1994: 206ff). While it may please neither Boden nor Collins, I find in Boden's study a nice *demonstration* of Collins's (1981) "microfoundations of macro-sociology" perspective. Valuable complementarity is again evident.

## 4 More Questions

I hope that this eclectic sampling of new developments linking discourse and sociology will whet readers' appetites.<sup>35</sup> Many critical questions about sociology-discourse relations have not even been dimly adumbrated. Consider only two questions central to sociological concerns, answers to which either require, or are at least more easily understood with, discourse (or text, or utterance, and so on) data. What, for example, is the relationship between the talk (or written communication) of interacting individuals or small groups (a concern of microsociology) and matters of language spread, maintenance, decline, loyalty, standardization, conflict, and so on (concerns of macrosociology)? Relatedly, how do cultures and societies (and for that matter, languages) reproduce themselves – or change?

## NOTES

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Thanks are due to colleagues Tom Gieryn, Kate O'Donnel, Ron Scollon, Greg Urban and, especially, Michael Silverstein, and are gratefully given. None of them (or others I may have consulted and then forgotten) is responsible for my skimpy attention to non-USA and other specific literatures. Several complained about it.

- 1 Curiously, an innovative text published right after the war (LaPiere 1946) treated not only language topics

but matters of war (another topic generally neglected by sociologists) as well. It apparently disappeared without a trace.

- 2 I find hyperbolic Lemert's (1979: 184) characterization of the situation of the early 1970s as one in which "language has become the prominent topic in sociology"; he elsewhere in the same treatment states more soberly, "it is not a surprise that a sociology living

- and working in the twilight of man has begun cautiously to turn to language" (1979: 229). I agree with Lemert that a sea change does not constitute a paradigm shift.
- 3 My own list would include theorists such as Basil Bernstein, Aaron Cicourel, and Thomas Luckmann, who have been more closely identified with issues of discourse and sociology.
  - 4 It is interesting that when *U.S. News and World Report* initiated a section on science in June 1998, the first topic explored was baby talk. It is also interesting that the focus was on nonsocial dimensions of the phenomenon. In seeking scientific status and public interest at the same time, the authors emphasized a "nature" versus "nurture" dichotomy which could not currently be characterized as central to language studies.
  - 5 One reader labels this characterization as "nonsense," stating that the situations and changes in situations are/have been "exactly the same" in the two disciplines – or in sociology at different points in time. Perhaps.
  - 6 I have written in other places on criteria for handbook articles. One criterion is completeness of coverage. Such coverage is not possible in a chapter of the length assigned me. Moreover, I was told by the editors that a piece touching on unresolved issues and new directions of research would be more appropriate than a literature review. I *have* covered a wider range of issues in other places.
  - 7 I have discussed several of these and other defining issues elsewhere. See, e.g. my 1974, 1992 (causal perspectives), 1973a, 1973b, 1981 (rules and other regularities), 1987a (sociology of language versus sociolinguistics), and 1987b (micro and macro dimensions). Many of these issues are treated at some length in the introductory and concluding chapters of the Multiple Analysis Project volumes (Grimshaw 1989; Grimshaw et al. 1994).
  - 8 Called Shokleng in Urban (1991) and referenced as "people of P.I. (Posta Indígena) Ibirama" in Urban (1996). What these people are to be called itself constitutes a problem of labeling – and perception.
  - 9 Collected in Bernstein's 1971 and 1975 volumes. On the characterization on the place of text in Bernstein's maturing theory which appears at the end of this paragraph, see my 1976.
  - 10 Nor, Michael Silverstein has observed (personal communication), with Bakhtinian "voice" effects in heteroglossia.
  - 11 In their perspective there *is* a world of "reality" constituted by material relations and an infinitely large number of symbolic characterizations or "appearances" of that world. The folk view that the relation between "reality" and "appearance" is isomorphic is wrong.
  - 12 Althusser, Austin, Barthes, Bernstein, Culler, Derrida, Foucault, Habermas, Heidegger, Hussell, Schutz, Vološinov, and Wittgenstein, among others.
  - 13 On diplomatic negotiation, see, e.g., Smith's (1989) intriguing examination of USA–USSR negotiations; on negotiation by high-ranking military officers see Grimshaw (1992a).
  - 14 Sociologists are increasingly aware of literatures on variation in speech production, especially those associated with class and gender (Scherer and Giles 1979 is a useful early collection; Peter Trudgill continues to write on socially based differentiation in speech production) and even with institution-based researches such as those of

- Czarniawska and Boden, to be discussed shortly. However, most sociologists tend to perceive research on language in terms of conversation analysis or of studies of social interaction as manifest in talk in small groups.
- 15 Reference to interactional moves is made below. On constraining sociological variables, see my 1989.
  - 16 Minimally a hyperbolic claim (one perhaps less charitable reader characterized the term complete as “nonsensical”). Schefflen (1973) included not only a full “lexical” transcript of a four-party therapeutic session but also a transcription of a film record. More detailed transcriptions were made available even earlier as part of the Natural History of an Interview project. See, more recently, Merlan and Rumsey (1991).
  - 17 On the chimera of completeness, see inter alia Grimshaw et al. (1994: *passim*) (including the discussion there of the Natural History of the Interview project and its attempt to generate a “complete” transcript), Cicourel (1994), Lucy (1993), and Silverstein and Urban (1996). Articles in the Lucy and in the Silverstein and Urban volumes are abundantly suggestive of new questions on the topic of this article and rich in identification of directions in which research directed to answering those questions could profitably be pursued. A useful discussion of these materials would require far more space than is available in this handbook chapter.
  - 18 Michael Silverstein (personal communication), who like other readers is uncomfortable with the use of “propositional” in talking about ways of talking, suggests, “this utterance form *counts as* ‘assigning blame’ or ‘blaming.’” He observes that a “rule” for identifying praise might look quite similar. That is, in part, the point.
  - 19 For example, specification of considerations of intensity, hostility, and violence. Grimshaw (1990a) includes an attempt to formulate propositions about relations among external threat, internal cohesion, and invocation of external threat in attempts to recruit allies in the course of conflict talk.
  - 20 There is no space in this brief chapter on some new (or recast) ways of looking at relationships among linguistics, sociolinguistics, and sociology and their common resource of discourse to address hoary issues of similarities and differences in treatment of regularities of behavior. Terms such as explanation, law, norm, principle, proposition, regularity, rule, universal, and their variants, with modifiers such as absolute, variable, statistical, substantive, and so on, have not traveled well across disciplinary boundaries. Nor is there agreement on discovery procedures.
  - 21 Kuhn continues by observing that technological improvements have often been vital in the development of new sciences. Studies of language in use in social contexts in any of their currently familiar forms would not be possible without modern electronic equipment.
  - 22 Halliday’s systemic-functional theory (various; see also de Joia and Stenton 1980) is perhaps the most comprehensive in terms of coverage of looking at what utterances *do* and how; the perspective does not appear to have generated a wide following in the United States. In Halliday’s own hands the theory is highly illuminating; see, especially his 1994. In any case, however productive the theory, it has not been articulated in a

- manner which makes it possible to consider it paradigmatic.
- 23 Space constraints make it impossible for me to more than mention a number of other profoundly thoughtful, exciting, and promising projects. Among omissions particularly disappointing to me and to early readers: (1) the language and identity industry generated by Anderson (1991), (2) the rich emerging literature on language and ideology, and (3) so-called "critical discourse analysis" and related topics of language and social control. All these topics are, as a favorite teacher used to say, "inextricably interrelated and intertwined." See also research in the volumes cited in n. 17.
- 24 Of (1) negotiation of an evaluation, (2) communicative nonsuccess, (3) conflict, and (4) employ of referential ambiguity in pronominal usage in social boundary work (see Grimshaw 1989; Grimshaw et al. 1994).
- 25 A more complete (comprehensiveness is an unattainable goal) analysis of a contextually situated conversation than is usually possible can be essayed through having multiple analysts investigate the same sound-image data record. My studies were part of the Multiple Analysis Project (Grimshaw et al. 1994) in which nine independent scholars did eight studies of the dissertation defense materials. See McQuown (1971), Zabor (1978), or chapter 1 in Grimshaw et al. (1994) for a pioneering collaborative project, *The Natural History of an Interview*.
- 26 See, again, section 1.3.
- 27 For this reason Silverstein (personal communication) prefers Latour as empirically foundational.
- 28 For a marginally more detailed characterization of Czarniawska's excellent book, see my 1998.
- 29 An "actant" is any entity, human or otherwise, and including not just other sentient beings such as animals, but also corporate entities (the IRS, workplaces, countries) events (Christmas, weddings, deadlines), things in nature (Mount Everest, Hurricane Andrew, the Black Death, environmental pollution), ideas, ideologies, and obsessions (salvation, independence, justice, mathematical proofs), and everything else in the world. Latour wants to assign greater autonomy to nonhumans and less to humans in all events; he says he uses the notion "actant" nonmetaphorically.
- 30 While less specifically oriented to literary perspectives and matters of discourse, Latour's (1996a) examination of interaction in a baboon troop is also fascinating, provocative, and highly sociological in its implications.
- 31 Ries reports that her conversational partners were not interested in suggestions (or questions) about ameliorative actions, and greeted "What can be done?" queries with silence – followed by more "horror stories." Examination of responses of action or resignation in other shortage situations such as wartime sieges or protracted drought should be useful.
- 32 I again draw on my review. See my 1995.
- 33 CA methods are increasingly employed by sociologists. Atkinson and Drew (1979) on court proceedings, Maynard (1984) on plea bargaining, and Goodwin (1990) on black children's play groups are impressive examples. These studies do not as directly as Boden foreground the epistemological issues implied by Sacks's posture as limned above (see, for example, Boden 1994: 214–15).

- 34 Michael Silverstein (personal communication) suggests that the physicians themselves may not be conscious of why they take one or another position.
- 35 Nn. 17 and 23 refer to a number of exciting and as yet undone researches. Anyone doubting that there are exciting things to study at the intersection of discourse and sociology should carefully read Steiner (1992). The book is putatively about issues of translation but filled with observations and notions about language in use in social contexts.

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