

Ian Parker

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# PSYCHOLOGY AFTER DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Concepts, methods, critique



PSYCHOLOGY AFTER CRITIQUE

ROUTLEDGE

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# Psychology After Discourse Analysis

Ian Parker has been a leading light in the fields of critical and discursive psychology for over 25 years. The *Psychology After Critique* series brings together for the first time his most important papers. Each volume in the series has been prepared by Ian Parker, features a newly written introduction and presents a focused overview of a key topic area.

*Psychology After Discourse Analysis* is the third volume in the series and addresses three central questions:

- How did discourse analysis develop inside psychology?
- How does discursive psychology address concerns about the traditional 'laboratory experiment' paradigm in psychology?
- What is the future for discourse analysis?

The book provides a clear account of the various forms of discourse analysis that have been used within psychology, and provides a review of their significance for a new generation of psychologists. The early chapters present a framework for understanding the origins of these various forms, as well as the differences between them. Emphasizing the gap between discursive psychology and mainstream psychology, Parker then explores relations between discourse analysis, psychoanalysis, social constructionism and the postmodern turn in the social sciences. The final chapters describe the limitations of discourse analysis and explore its flaws as a framework and as a practice, questioning its future within academia and in political and social contexts beyond psychology.

*Psychology After Discourse Analysis* is essential reading for students and researchers in psychology, sociology, social anthropology and cultural studies, and for discourse analysts of different traditions. It will also introduce key ideas and debates in critical psychology for undergraduates and postgraduate students across the social sciences.

**Ian Parker** is Professor of Management in the School of Management, University of Leicester, UK, Honorary Professor of Education in the Manchester Institute of Education, University of Manchester, UK, and Co-Director of the Discourse Unit, UK ([www.discourseunit.com](http://www.discourseunit.com)).

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## **Psychology After Critique**

Ian Parker has been at the centre of developments in critical and discursive psychology for over 25 years. The *Psychology After Critique* series brings together for the first time his most important and influential papers. Each volume in the series has been prepared by Ian Parker, presents a concise and focused overview of a key topic area, and includes a newly written introduction which traces the continuing impact of the 'crisis', 'deconstruction', 'discourse analysis', 'psychoanalysis' and 'Lacanian research' inside the discipline of psychology.

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# **Psychology After Discourse Analysis**

Concepts, methods, critique

**Ian Parker**

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## Series foreword

In the essays collected in these six volumes Ian Parker has brought together for the first time the two radical movements that began in social psychology in the 1960s and 1970s. One of these movements was based on a critical appraisal of the defective methodology of the research programmes that emanated from mainstream American social psychologists. This was rejected for a variety of reasons by a wide variety of critics who shared the belief that people actually deal with what they take to be the meanings of what is happening around them and the significance of the arenas in which actions were performed, according to the rules and conventions of their local social order. The results of a shallow, positivistic approach to discerning the wellsprings of human social behaviour were rejected as sources of reliable knowledge. How people thought, acted, felt and perceived their worlds had little to do with how people actually lived their lives together. People in the stripped-down meaningless worlds of the social psychological experiment were not reacting to stimuli, just trying to make sense of anomic situations with whatever resources their education and history had provided them. People are not empty sites for causal processes but active agents engaged in the tasks and projects that their lives throw up.

At the same time, and for the most part independently, a different kind of criticism was emerging – a display of the moral aspects of the very kind of psychology that was rejected as unscientific by the methodological sceptics. If people believed that psychologists were unearthing the truth about how people thought and acted, then insofar as actual people were unlike this paradigm they would or should strive to achieve it. The realization that such psychology-driven workbooks of human vagaries such as the DSM series of manuals, by presenting a range of ways for human beings to live and act as disorders, defined a kind of person to be emulated who was very much like the bland artefact generated by the statistical methods of the American mainstream, all dissent and difference being ironed out in the deference to some arbitrary level of statistical significance. Critical psychology began to

reveal the ways in which the power structures of society and the relations between people from different social classes were brought about. Critical psychology drew from social constructionism the principle that when you can see how something is manufactured you can change it.

The strangest of all the eccentricities of the 'main stream' was the neglect of language. It could hardly be more obvious that the main medium of social interactions is linguistic. Once that is acknowledged the way is open for another dimension – the study of the differences between the linguistically differentiated cultures of the various tribes of humankind. This was not 'cross-cultural psychology' which was merely the transfer of Western middle-class conceptions of life to shape research into the lives of people of very different ways of thinking and acting.

In this elegant introduction to the field of critical psychology Ian Parker shows how gradually but inexorably the two streams began to merge, a process that is continuing. The most striking way in which a critical psychology is currently evolving is in the development of psychology as a moral science. Tied to this insight are explicit studies of the way rights and duties come between natural and acquired tendencies to act and the possibilities that different local moral orders allow: the rapidly growing field of positioning theory.

But all was not plain sailing. The turn to deconstruction, via a reshaping of the linguistic turn to encompass the richer domain of discourse, led to the neglect of the key claim that the 'new psychology' gave socially relative and epoch-specific reliable knowledge, at least pro tem. To reclaim psychiatry from the neurochemists, the place of the active person within a local framework was an essential core to be defended. If persons fade away into clusters of locally contingent selves the key point of the reality of human agency was in danger of being lost.

The second deep insight – perhaps more important than the defence of persons, was relocation of 'mind' to the social network of meaningful interactions, the mind in society. When we learn to abstract ourselves one by one from the social nexus from which each of us emerges we bear with us the indelible mark of our cultural origins. The recoverable content of psycho-dynamics relocates the unconscious to 'what lies between'. In the end we turn back to language and relate symbolic systems not as abstract calculi obeying inbuilt species-specific rules but as the common instruments with which we manage our lives. Psychology can be nothing but the study of cultural-historical-instrumental practices of our ever-changing tribal societies.

The *Psychology After Critique* series is the comprehensive resource we have been waiting for to enable new generations not only of budding psychologists but all those who concern themselves with how we might live, to



find their way through the mistakes of the positivistic illusion of a science to a just appreciation of what it might be to come to understand the myriad ways a human being can be a person among persons.

Rom Harré

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## Series preface

What is psychology? Once upon a time psychologists imagined that they knew the answer to this question. Their object of study, they argued, should be the way that individuals perceive the world, think about it and act in it together with other people. Perception and thinking, in developmental and cognitive psychology, for example, was studied as if it only happened inside the heads of the experimental 'subjects' in scientific laboratories and then 'social psychology' often amounted to little more than an accumulation of the behaviour of those same atomized individuals. The idea that people talked to each other, and that this talk might actually have an effect on the way that people behaved and understood themselves was outside the frame of that kind of academic work.

This series of books is about the consequences of talk being taken seriously, the consequences for scientific investigation and for the way that many researchers today are building innovative new research projects. The discipline of psychology has been transformed since a 'paradigm crisis' erupted nearly half a century ago when pioneers in research into the role of language in thinking and behaviour picked up the thread of early 'radical psychology' critiques which homed in on the limitations of their discipline. The 'paradigm crisis' threw into question the silent world presupposed by the psychologists and launched us all into a world of intense debate over the role of language, of discourse and then of what is shut out of discourse, of the unconscious and of psychoanalysis.

These books were produced in the context of fierce arguments about methods in psychology and over the kinds of concepts we needed to develop in order to do better more radical research. The Discourse Unit was founded in Manchester as a Centre for Qualitative and Theoretical Research on the Reproduction and Transformation of Language, Subjectivity and Practice in 1990. Today it operates as an international trans-institutional collaborative centre which supports a variety of qualitative and theoretical research projects contributing to the development of radical theory and practice. The

term ‘discourse’ is used primarily in critical hermeneutic and structuralist senses to include inquiries influenced by feminism and psychoanalysis. The centre functions as a resource base for qualitative and feminist work, as a support unit for the (re)production of radical academic theory, and as a networking centre for the development of critical perspectives in action research.

We took as our starting point the ‘crisis’ and the need for critical reflection on the discipline of psychology, the place of psychology and appeals to psychology in other academic disciplines. We then saw the need for a ‘critical psychology’ that was concerned not only with what went on inside the academic world but also with the way that psychological ideas functioned in the real world outside the universities. The books in this series are written mostly by one individual participant in those debates, but they bring together a number of different arguments for perspectives on the nature of scientific paradigms, deconstruction from literary theory, discourse analysis, psychosocial studies, psychoanalysis and clinical work that were elaborated by researchers in the Discourse Unit.

The books together trace a narrative from the early recognition that language is crucial to understand what is happening in traditional laboratory-experimental psychology – why that kind of psychology is quite useless in telling us about human action – to the development of discourse analysis and the connections with some more radical attempts to ‘deconstruct’ language from other neighbouring disciplines. A concern with different kinds of psychoanalytic theory – the innovative work now taking place in psychosocial studies – is then introduced to conceptualize the nature of subjectivity. But from the beginning there are some ‘red threads’ that lead us from the study of language and subjectivity to the study of power and ideology.

These books about psychology as an academic discipline and the increasing role of psychology in our everyday lives are also about the politics of research. And so, when we began to discuss the role of ‘deconstruction’ or ‘psychoanalysis’ in the Discourse Unit we always asked whether those other conceptual frameworks would help or hinder us in understanding the connections between knowledge and social change. The books do not pretend to be neutral disinterested description of trends of research in psychology. Our ‘crisis’ was always about the possibility that the turn to language would also be a turn to more politically engaged – Marxist and feminist – radical reflection on what the theories and methods conceal and what we could open up. The books are accounts of the emergence of key debates after ‘the crisis’ and sites of ‘critical psychological’ reflection on the nature of psychology itself.

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# Introduction

## Psychology after discourse analysis

This book, the third in the series *Psychology After Critique*, explores the impact of discourse analysis as one of the most radical methodological developments in the discipline in the wake of the ‘paradigm crisis’ in psychology. Competing conceptions of research in psychology have emerged in recent years, and the strengthening of qualitative research before, and then with increasing influence alongside, and now after the emergence of discourse analysis as a specific approach, enables us to shift from a link between method and discipline to a new, more fruitful connection between method and innovation (Banister *et al.*, 2011).

When we founded the Discourse Unit in 1990 we took the study of ‘discourse’ as our focus because it seemed to us then that the most radical stance we could adopt towards the discipline would be to turn around and examine the accounts that psychologists gave of other people’s behaviour as sets of ‘discourses’ rather than as scientific facts. In the ‘new paradigm’ researchers had argued for a turn to language which valued the stories ordinary people – the ‘non-psychologists’ as they are commonly thought of – told about themselves (Harré and Secord, 1972). These researchers drew on structuralist ideas about language, but paid keen attention to the question of human agency. They thus combined an attention to the way little social worlds (like classrooms and football terraces) were structured with a humanist sympathy for the way people in those social worlds made meaning. In this way, the ‘new paradigm’ continued in the line of the ‘modern’ Western Enlightenment project of mainstream psychology.

Discourse analysis took this work forward in a ‘turn to discourse’ that focused attention on the many competing structures of language and the way these enabled speakers to engage in the ‘social construction’ of reality. This was an approach that was more in tune with so-called ‘post-structuralist’ ideas, and was even seen by some supporters and critics as being ‘postmodern’ (Parker, 2002). The development of discourse analysis also facilitated the uptake of radical theoretical accounts of subjectivity, including from new

forms of psychoanalysis. This book should be read alongside other books in the series that deal specifically with the crisis debates, deconstruction and aspects of psychoanalytic and 'psychosocial' research. This introduction, and then the chapters in the book are concerned with how discourse analysis developed inside psychology, what discursive psychology had to say about critical debates in the discipline, and where discourse analysis is going now.

### **The 'turn to discourse'**

The point has been made by historians that the discipline of psychology is held together not so much by shared conceptions of its object of study – the psychology textbooks are testimony to lack of agreement about what we should be describing – but by its *method* (Rose, 1985). Agreement about the way we should study the many different things that are taken to be part of 'psychology' defines it as a separate domain of research, and also not-coincidentally characterizes it as a discipline, as a form of discipline. A 'method' is taken to include a certain kind of 'procedure' that is brought to bear on what were for many years called our 'subjects', and strict adherence to this procedure was thought to guarantee that the study could be replicated by other researchers. In this way the motif of 'prediction and control' applied not only to the behaviour of subjects but to the researchers as subjects themselves (Parker, 2007a).

In the positivist laboratory-experimental paradigm, a paradigm that to all intents and purposes was treated as necessarily 'quantitative' because it was assumed that only that which was measurable was worth noticing, different methodological frameworks (ranging from recording reaction times to gathering responses to questionnaires) were expressed as method in specific steps (Harré and Secord, 1972). The steps should, as part of a method, follow a sequence in order to produce a result that would only differ according to conditions under which the steps were followed or the characteristics of the subjects altered. The criteria used to assess the value of the research then logically rested on the reliability and validity of the procedures, including those embedded in the research instruments, the apparatus used to measure behaviour (Burman and MacLure, 2005). It was only the fixed nature of the grid used and followed by researchers that could ensure that it would be recognizable to other researchers, recognizable as psychology as such.

A consequence of these notions of method, steps and criteria for research was that psychology had to factor language itself into the discipline as something recognizably psychological, as psychology compatible with the forms of discipline that studied it. Language then came to be described as another sequence of variables that must be segmented into forms of expression that could be measured by the researcher. One way of doing this is to treat

language as a form of 'verbal behaviour', which was the way of the behaviourists (Skinner, 1957). With the development of cognitive models a corresponding cognitivist conception of language emerged which moderated that behaviourist account. However, this cognitive conception simply treated elements of language as behavioural sequences which contained within them the packets of communication that were expressed by the speaker (or writer) and then unwrapped by the listener (or reader) (Easthope, 1990).

Discourse analysis marks a conceptual break from behavioural and cognitive models of language as expression of response to stimuli or as communication of ideas from inside the head of an individual to others. Crucially for psychology, and as a preliminary requirement of research into discourse, it breaks from methodological assumptions in the old paradigm, to carry out its work in an entirely different, qualitative, paradigm (Harré, 2004). The extent to which the study of language now takes its place in qualitative research as a paradigm concerned with meaning rather than behaviour, with interpretation rather than measurement, and with an ethos of accountability rather than deception that marked the old paradigm is a matter of debate, an open question (Reason and Rowan, 1981). How we answer that question will depend on the specific methodological frameworks we adopt and how we put those methodological frameworks into practice as method in discourse analysis.

### **Critical discursive psychology**

For the purposes of our exploration of the field of discourse analysis, the following principles will be important. The first principle for innovative discursive research is that in place of fixed method abstracted from context, we are concerned from the beginning of our work with the phenomena we study as *historically* constituted. This means that even before the analysis begins we are oriented to noticing how the phenomenon has come into being and how it changes.

The second principle is that, in place of simple steps that should be followed, we know that we must bring to bear upon the phenomenon a *theoretical* understanding. A theory or cluster of competing theories always guides a researcher, whether these are implicit or explicit. In much traditional research in psychology they are either borrowed from the existing reductive models of the person or unthinkingly adapted from the commonsensical images of the person that surround the discipline. Our task is to turn what is implicit into that which is explicit, and to develop theory that is useful for our purposes in research.

The third principle is to embed some kind of account of *subjectivity* into the research process, and even if that account is not immediately



developed as a theory of the subjectivity of those inhabiting the discourse we describe, it should at least include the subjectivity of the researcher in forms of reflexivity. We notice and describe the world from particular positions, and the position of the researcher needs to be specified at some point in some kind of reflexive analysis so that the claims that are made are more readily assessable by the reader of the research.

Once history, theory and subjectivity are brought centre-stage in research, we are able to appreciate how innovation becomes more important to good research than discipline. Each piece of new research that locates what it studies in history, that brings theory to bear on the way it is conceptualized and that includes the subjectivity of the researcher must *invent* its methodology anew. Good research takes previous studies into account but refuses to simply replicate the method in a sequence of steps that obey a fixed grid of criteria that conform to the way that the discipline of psychology defines its objects. Existing approaches to discourse analysis are, as we shall see, internally contradictory, and are all the better for that, and it is from that existing work and the contradictions that define them that a researcher will be able to develop new studies and new methodologies (Banister *et al.*, 2011). In the course of the book I mark the boundaries between forms of discourse analysis in the hope that researchers taking up some of these ideas in their own research will disturb those boundaries and invent new connections between the concepts.

### **Discourse analysis now: self-critique and trans-disciplinary research practice**

Discourse analysis was already from its origins in such interdisciplinary projects as the ‘Sociology of Scientific Knowledge’, intensely reflexive (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Woolgar, 1988). Discourse analysts were open to thinking about ‘science’ as a social construction, about their own disciplines (such as psychology) as social constructions, and even about their own practice as socially constructed. It was that self-critical aspect of the approach that led some psychologists to assume that the approach was ‘relativist’ or even ‘postmodern’. I must admit that I did think at one point that a ‘realist’ approach in discursive research was a progressive alternative to relativism (Parker, 1992a).

I was wrong, and see now that thorough-going relativism in psychology of the kind promoted by the discourse analysts, including my friends and colleagues in the Discourse and Rhetoric Group (DARG) at Loughborough, was the best way of dismantling the scientific truth claims and managerial ambitions of psychology. But where do we go now after self-critique? The trajectory of this book is towards a more sustained attention to the role of

psychology in the world outside the academic discipline, to 'psychologization' in culture, and to the activities of ordinary people as they themselves carry out forms of discourse analysis. This leads us to look carefully at boundaries in research, and at the way different kinds of boundary raise questions about the nature of our different domains of academic work and their relation to practice.

The first boundary is the boundary between psychology as a distinct discipline that concerns itself with the nature of individual thinking and behaviour on the one hand, and, on the other, 'psychological culture' as the field of application and elaboration of psychology, a field within which psychologists have to compete against a variety of popular commonsensical accounts of how people think and behave (Gordo and De Vos, 2010). This is the boundary between those who work as theorists and practitioners in the 'psy-complex', those who have expert understanding, and the people who puzzle about what the psychologists know about them. This boundary is discursively organized, and it is indeed discursively organized within material institutional practices.

What we psychologists think we know about the 'nature' of human psychology is culturally specific, and certain kinds of academic and professional psychology hold sway (e.g. Burman, 2008a). This, both locally in each distinct sector of the capitalist economy by virtue of the imperative to manage the work and leisure pursuits of normal folk as well as the abnormal ones who will not play the game, and globally under contemporary neoliberal forms of imperialism through the hegemony of specific definitions of what counts as human labour power, what is countable as consumer preference, and what can be accumulated by those who have sufficient capital. The key point here is that there is no 'psychology' as such, only historically constituted psychologies that have already mutated many times and will be transformed when we transform the discursive boundary between the psychologists and the so-called 'non-psychologists'.

The second boundary is the boundary between discourse analysis as a distinct academic practice that concerns itself with forms of language and the way it is structured in texts on the one hand and, on the other, 'discursive culture' as the field of argument, rhetorical contest and political debate within which the discourse analysts find themselves jostling against a variety of popular commonsensical ideas about how people talk and write and why it matters. This, then, is the boundary between the discourse analysts in academic departments and people outside who are already carrying out forms of discourse analysis as part of their critical and disruptive readings of texts. The key point here is that this boundary is also discursively organized, and this discursive organization is, once again, woven into material institutional practices.

This means that discourse analysts need to challenge how that boundary between the inside and outside of their discipline distributes certain forms of expertise so that certain kinds of practice inside the discipline is regulated and certain kinds of practice outside the discipline is rendered invisible. There is no 'discourse analysis' as such, only historically constituted forms of close reading, reinterpretation and rewriting, forms that either serve to embed our understanding of language in certain dominant cultural practices or enable us to open the way to a transformation of language. This is where we come to a point of intersection between the two boundaries.

When I refer to 'language' it should be clear by now that it is as discursive practice, and so to speak of 'critical discursive practice' is to take a stance towards it (Burman *et al.*, 1996). Critical discursive practice is a domain of work that is important to many 'critical psychologists' because it enables us to turn around and treat our own discipline as a collection of texts susceptible to deconstruction (Parker, 2002). One activity at the intersection between psychology and discourse analysis, or at the intersection between the two boundaries that structure how each disciplinary practice maintains itself, is where we critical psychologists try to make sure that critical colleagues outside psychology do not look to us, to any of us, to supply the 'psychological' explanation, to fill in the gap that those from other disciplines think it is necessary to fill (Parker, 2005a).

But there is another activity which is just as important, which is where we attend to the way that certain psychological assumptions, culturally and historically specific assumptions, reappear in work on discourse. We need to attend to the way that discourse work specifies forms of behaviour and forms of interiority, and the way it takes certain 'psychological' notions for granted. Of course, discourse theory has been able to distance itself from the idea that language simply enables thoughts to be conveyed from one head to another, coded and decoded by sender and receiver, and so susceptible to decoding by an astute analyst (Easthope, 1990). There are still discourse analysts in psychology who do think that when they study language they are also necessarily revealing underlying thought processes in the author of a spoken or written text, and that is certainly a problem we still need to tackle on our side of the intersection between our different areas of work. However, what concern us here are the other less obvious temptations to psychologize that seep into discourse work and that would then seep back into psychology that drew upon that work. Notions of cognitive processing, schemata, interpellation, phenomenological immediacy and embodied meaning are still too easily to hand in discourse and need to be treated with care, with suspicion (Parker, 1992a).

It is not surprising that such temptations should be so available, so pressing; not so much because the psychologists themselves have been such

good salesmen but because they too draw upon and feed back to us different forms of contemporary psychological culture that make individual thought processes seem to be the point of explanation for patterns of exploitation and resistance (Parker, 1989). Contemporary psychological culture, which is globalizing the domain of 'psychology' as a field of explanation in part through the spread of the English language, is a potent structuring force, a system of discursive practices interlaced with global and local political-economic processes, and it needs to be tackled as a powerful phenomenon by critical discourse analysts. Let us turn to some examples of psychological culture that discourse analysts need to tackle. Two graphic examples will illustrate some practical interventions in discourse by those outside academic discourse analysis.

First, the 'London Psychogeographical Association' has members who have been active in the main anti-capitalist protests over the past decade or so, but their own critical discursive practice is an intervention that is designed to shake up the form and content of debate. One of their initiatives is 'three-sided football', something that has profound implications for the way we think about boundaries and the opposition between different groupings, whether they are academic groupings or disciplinary groupings. One participant proclaims that 'In England, the resistance will be led by the London Psychogeographical Association, who will use games of three-sided football to free people from the shackles of dualistic thinking' (London Psychogeographical Association, 1997: 88).

A second example, which owes something to situationist interventions into public texts, is 'Glop Art'. This refers to the activity of sticking bits of chewing gum on advertising posters in the London Underground, an activity that has also provoked some agonizing among its participants about the extra work it might entail for the cleaners. Nevertheless, the strategic addition of a bit of gum intervenes in the image and changes it; so it is claimed, for example, that 'Glop Art represents the cutting edge of critical thinking among outsider artists whose opposition to all forms of capitalist culture manifests itself as a self-conscious ethical positioning' (Blissett, 1997: 199).

These practices refuse to participate in the usual ameliorative procedures of academic life, even in those procedures that pretend to be the most critical, including in 'critical psychology' (Parker, 2011a). There is no 'advice' to those in power as to how messages could be decoded or reformatted, and no dialogue about how signifiers could be rearticulated. Operating at the intersection between a refusal of academic discourse analysis and a refusal of academic psychology, they raise a question as to how we, on this side of our boundary, will use our position in solidarity with them, will use our own academic position to transform the cultural practices that we participate in.

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# 1 Discourse analysis

## Dimensions of critique in psychology

In the early years of the Discourse Unit we spent many hours discussing with students and colleagues how to make sense of the different 'introductions' to discourse analysis that were each giving competing accounts of what the approach was. In many cases these introductions were from different disciplinary contexts – linguists, literary theory, philosophy, sociology and political theory – and as time went on the appearance of a tradition of discourse analysis in psychology helped matters a bit. But not much, because there are now still many versions of discourse analysis in psychology that carry with them assumptions from the host discipline from which they were gathered.

This chapter tackles that confusion by providing a map by which researchers might at least be able to identify where the different accounts of discourse analysis are coming from. It provides a systematic account of eight different forms of discourse analysis organized into four different levels of approach, ranging from the micro-interpersonal level to historical-political level. This is a longer version of a paper that was eventually cut to size for publication in a qualitative research in psychology journal.

Discourse analysis in psychology provides a range of conceptual and methodological resources for thinking critically about the discipline of psychology. These conceptual and methodological resources also reorient researchers in the discipline away from a search for causes of behaviour inside the heads of individuals to social contexts in which human beings construct and challenge what has been presented to them as 'facts' about their nature or

possibilities for change. Discourse analysis has sometimes even been treated as synonymous with 'critical psychology', and enabled politically progressive alternative approaches to subjectivity, so this paper also reviews connections with 'critical psychological' approaches and more broadly with dimensions of critique in research.

Research that aims to connect discourse analysis with critical psychology faces at least two problems. The first is that, as is the case for the forms of language it studies, 'discourse analysis' itself poses a choice for researchers who use it to describe or change the world, a choice which hinges on the idea that we always either reproduce or transform phenomena when we describe them. There are forms of discourse analysis that aim to merely describe forms of language, and so they 'reproduce' what they find. Against this politically conservative choice, we are concerned here with discourse analysis that transforms the world, the kind of analysis that connects interpretation with change. The phrase 'reproduction or transformation' is borrowed from a 'realist' tradition of inquiry (Bhaskar, 1986). That tradition is sometimes pitted against discourse analysis, and it does draw attention to the importance of 'structure' as a condition for or constraint upon human agency (Parker, 1988).

The second problem is that there is a host of different approaches to discourse analysis, and each approach is governed by a series of conceptual and methodological terms which themselves orient the researcher to attend to specific delimited aspects of language. This array of different approaches causes much confusion to a researcher beginning to learn to notice the structuring force of language and wanting to study it. Our response to this diversity in the field of discourse analysis is to treat this as an opportunity, and to clarify the role of different approaches in order to map the field. A critical psychologist could then make use of different elements of the approach and formulate their own research questions and possible ways of answering them.

I will focus on eight different approaches to discourse analysis, and our journey through these approaches, described in such a way as to emphasize choices about 'levels' of analysis, will take us through dimensions of research that connect in different ways with political and ideological questions. One reason there are so many varieties of discourse analysis is that there has been a focus on language in research that has taken different forms in different disciplines. This disciplinary separation can serve as an obstacle

for those wanting to carry out interdisciplinary or, as we would prefer to say, ‘trans-disciplinary’ research (Curt, 1994). We are concerned with discourse analysis in psychology here, and so that also immediately brings us to the question of ‘reproduction and transformation’. Then we are able to focus on how the discipline reproduces certain assumptions about method and how critical psychology needs to transform those assumptions (Parker, 2007a).

We will move up through four different ‘levels’ of analysis, beginning with the smallest-scale level that is usually treated as the domain of ‘psychology’, and at each level we will notice the way that a particular approach either attends to the dimension of time or space. We begin with the lowest-order conceptions of time and space that define how individuals relate to one another moment by moment and in small self-contained interaction, and trace our way up to include study of larger temporal sequences and social activity. We will oscillate between an attention to time and attention to space in this account in which we designate each approach by a two- or three-letter acronym (TLA).

### **Little things in context**

As we begin with a focus on the kinds of discourse analysis that concentrates on little sequences of interaction in little spaces, it should be emphasized that we do not assume that bigger is better, that larger-scales of analysis are more politically progressive. There are implications here for our understanding of psychology and for the development of critical psychology in work at a micro-level as much as that at a macro-level of research. We begin with the dimension of time.

#### ***1 In time: CA***

The first approach, Conversation Analysis (CA), is extremely small-scale in its temporal scope, and has found its way into psychology from across the disciplinary borders with what is sometimes known as ‘micro-sociology’.

Conversation Analysis is devoted to detailed description of formal properties of talk, and builds upon the lectures of Harvey Sacks (1992). In the apparently most simple formulations that Sacks analyses – such as ‘The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.’ – Sacks (1972) teases apart the mutual implication of subjects ordered around social categories. Attention to ‘membership categorization devices’ has spawned a separate ‘Membership Categorization Analysis’ (MCA) strand of work that already begins to show us how micro-interaction replicates social structures (Hester and Eglin, 1997).

In CA, talk, in conversations or in other sequences that maintain or ‘repair’ the orderliness of everyday interaction, is unpicked and marked

in a close reading of transcripts using a specific vocabulary (Sacks *et al.*, 1974); this includes ‘pre-sequencing’ to initiate a conversation or new topic, ‘adjacency pairs’ to describe how participants arrange their turns to speak, and ‘preference organization’ to describe how some responses which agree with or accept the action performed before it are apparently more smoothly undertaken (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984).

The orderliness and repair of what is sometimes called ‘naturally occurring’ conversation can be used to show how emotion that seems to disrupt talk is managed in therapy (Peräkylä *et al.*, 2008). In forms of CA treated as a version of discourse analysis in psychology there has been an extension of the approach to include detailed transcription of non-verbal interaction, such as crying (Hepburn, 2004).

CA is not behaviourist as such, but it is concerned with the form of talk rather than content, and this is something that separates it from other approaches to discourse analysis. It is precisely this behaviourally oriented aspect of the approach, to the forms of order that can be observed and described in extremely detailed transcription of behaviour that has set the battle lines between CA as such and those who have tried to extend it to account for wider structural issues, of the organization of power between men and women, for example. Hence complaints that so-called ‘Feminist Conversation Analysis’ (FCA) (Kitzinger, 2000) enables the leakage into the analysis of illicit content, of interpretation that is theoretically or politically informed (Wowk, 2007). FCA does allow for connections between the micro-level of interaction and societal processes, for analysis of the reproduction and transformation of the social order (Whelan, 2012). Anecdotal accounts mingled in with the analysis are thus particularly vexing for those who want to keep the analysis strictly in line with Sacks’ prescriptions (Kitzinger, 2000).

Methodologically, Conversation Analysis in psychology fits very neatly with the empiricist tradition in the discipline in the English-speaking world and so this means that it is also quite conservative. An emphasis on ‘transcription’ as part of the method is evidence of this (Potter, 1998). However, apart from FCA (which, probably for tactical reasons, insists that it is also a rigorous empirical analysis that does not inject its own content into its readings of interaction), CA does connect with critical perspectives in ‘respecifying’, at least, what are usually taken to be internal ‘cognitive’ procedures in psychology as properties of publically accountable shared interaction (Edwards, 1997).

We can make use of this, and alongside the already existing analyses of the ordering of gender and sexuality in this tradition of work, there is the basis of something that is almost already ‘critical psychology’ (Gough and McFadden, 2001). However, the aversion of Conversation Analysis to



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