

37 Discourse Analysis in Communication

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0 Introduction

Communication refers to many things: it is the process through which individuals as well as institutions exchange information; it is the name for the everyday activity in which people build, but sometimes blast apart, their intimate, work, and public relationships; it is a routinely offered solution to the problems engendered in societies in which people need to live and work with others who differ from themselves; it is a compelling intellectual issue of interest to scholars from diverse academic disciplines; and it is the name of the particular academic discipline I call home. In this chapter I offer my take on the field of Communication's take on discourse analysis. I draw attention to this chapter being my view, not to undermine what I have to say, but because I am an individual speaking for "the group," where the group is a diverse, squabbling family that does not see things the same way.

The chapter begins with background about the field of Communication¹ and how it connects with discourse analytic studies. Then, I focus on five exemplars of discourse research, book-length analyses that make apparent differences among traditions within Communication. In discussing each example, additional studies that are topically and/or methodologically similar are identified. I conclude by identifying the intellectual features that give discourse studies conducted by communication scholars a family resemblance.

1 Background on Communication

Although the importance of communication in everyday life is relatively transparent, what exactly Communication is as a discipline is not so. The field of Communication is a particularly American phenomenon, tracing its institutional origins to around 1900, when it initially existed as a pedagogical area within English departments (Cohen 1994). College speech teachers, as communication professionals then thought

of themselves, broke away to form their own departments to give oral practices such as public speaking and debate the attention that, in English departments, were given only to written literary texts. In the ensuing decades the communication field underwent multiple transformations: becoming research-oriented, rather than primarily teaching, changing the name of its professional associations from "speech" to communication, expanding the oral practices it studied from public speaking and debate to group discussion, communication in developing relationships and among intimates, interaction in work and institutional settings, and mediated communications of all forms (e.g. radio, TV, computers).

Interestingly, scholars (Rogers 1994) who study mass communication often frame the birth of the field² in the post-World War II era, with communication's turn to social science and the start of research institutes at several major universities. This version of history, however, does not fit well for discourse researchers, who typically developed their scholarly identities in the (then) speech departments, where social science inquiry coexisted, sometimes happily and at other times acrimoniously, with its humanistic counterpart, rhetorical studies.

Fields divide their intellectual terrain into areas. These decisions, or perhaps more accurately "historical happenings," influence the shape of issues in ways that scholars involved in them often themselves do not fully understand. In linguistics, for instance, scholars are typically divided into areas by which aspect of the code they study (phonology, syntax, semantic, pragmatics). Communication's central way of dividing scholars is by contexts of focal interest (face-to-face, commonly called interpersonal communication, organizational communication, mass communications, and rhetorical studies (study of public, civic life)). Any simple categorization system creates problems, and communication scholars (e.g. Chaffee and Berger 1987) have been critical of dividing by context. While the criticism has been influential – many communication researchers regard dividing the field by context as a poor way to organize information and intellectual issues – nonetheless, because no better macro-system has emerged, it continues to shape intellectual activities in a myriad of ways. Most relevant to this review is the fact that discourse analytic work began among interpersonal communication researchers.

Until relatively recently, research in interpersonal communication predominantly used experimental methods and sophisticated statistical testing procedures to study interaction among people. Against this set of taken-for-granted practices, scholars doing discourse analysis were taking a radical methodological turn. An upshot of the disciplinary context within which discourse studies emerged is that "discourse analysis"³ in communication is conceived as a method of inquiry. This contrasts with linguistics (Schiffrin 1994), for instance, in which discourse is typically treated as a level of linguistic analysis: from a linguistic viewpoint, discourse analysts are scholars who study a particular unit of language (above the sentence) or how language is used socially. Since virtually all communication research focuses on language units larger than individual sentences and considers what people do with language, as well as other symbolic forms, linguistics' definition was not especially useful in Communication. Instead, what separated discourse analysts in Communication from their nondiscourse colleagues was the study of these topics in everyday situations⁴ rather than in the laboratory or through questionnaires. Within Communication, then, discourse analysis is the *study of talk (or text) in context, where research reports use excerpts*

and their analysis as the central means to make a scholarly argument. Moreover, since choosing discourse analysis was choosing a method that was not standard, this methodological choice required explicit justification, and, at least some of the time, showing how the choice tied to a researcher's commitments about the purpose of inquiry.

Within the area of interpersonal communication, for instance, social (or interpretive) approaches to inquiry are typically contrasted with quantitative behavioral ones. Quantitative approaches study communication actions out of their social context with a goal of generating broad-based explanations; often, although by no means exclusively, the explanations are cognitive. Interpretive theorists (e.g. Lannamann 1991; Leeds-Hurwitz 1995; Sigman 1987, 1995), in contrast, have argued for the importance of studying communication as a socially situated activity. In comparison to discourse scholars from other disciplines, then, communication research includes more metatheoretical commentary and methodological elaboration – explication about how talk materials are selected, transcribed, and interpreted. Whatever the topical focus of a discourse analytic study in communication, it is flavored by the backgrounded controversy of whether study of face-to-face interaction is better done through close study of small amounts of naturally occurring talk or through examining theoretically prespecified variables for larger numbers of people in controlled settings.

In the first handbook of discourse analysis van Dijk (1985) identified classical rhetorical writers (e.g. Aristotle, Quintilian, and Cicero) as the first discourse analysts. Within Communication this claim has two sides. At one level, rooting contemporary discourse studies in classical rhetoric is unproblematic: classical rhetoric is the intellectual starting point for much of what goes on in the communication field today. At another level, however, it generates confusion. Within the field the study of public life (rhetorical criticism and theory) is an ongoing area of scholarly work and is, itself, a distinct academic specialization. Scholars who label themselves rhetorical theorists and critics are rarely the same individuals as ones who consider themselves discourse analysts. Rhetorical criticism and discourse analysis share the commitment to close study of texts in context. Yet the commitment gets understood and pursued against markedly different intellectual backdrops. Rhetorical criticism is pursued within a humanistic frame where analyses of texts are related to literary criticism, political and continental philosophy, history, film studies, and so on. Discourse analysis, in contrast, is typically grounded in social science and considers its cognate disciplines to be psychology, sociology, linguistics, education, and so on. Moreover, where rhetorical critics tend to study speeches and unique political actions,⁵ discourse analysts tend to study those aspects of social life that are ordinary and unremarkable. Although the division between social science and humanistic work is considerably more blurred than it was in the late 1980s (e.g. Mumby and Clair 1997; Taylor 1993), it continues to demarcate intellectual communities.

One distinctive feature of Communication is its recognition, even embracing, of the value of multiple perspectives on issues. Communication has an openness to other fields' ideas and models of inquiry rarely found in other academic disciplines. On the negative side, this openness can make it difficult to figure out how a piece of communication research is distinct from one in a neighboring discipline. For instance, depending on one's place in the field, communication researchers might be asked how their research is different from social psychology, business and industrial

relations, anthropology, political science, sociology, pragmatic studies within linguistics, and so on. Yet as I will argue at this review's end, the discourse analytic work carried out by communication scholars reflects a shared disciplinary perspective. Although the distinctiveness of the perspective has not always been well understood, even by its practitioners, the perspective embodies a set of intellectual commitments that can enliven and enrich the multidisciplinary conversation about discourse.

2 Five Examples

2.1 *Telephone talk (Hopper)*

Telephone Conversation (Hopper 1992a) extends and synthesizes studies by Robert Hopper and his colleagues about the interactional structure in telephone talk (e.g. Hopper 1989, 1990/1; Hopper and Doany 1988). At the book's start Hopper provides evidence that talking on the telephone is a significant part of everyday life, noting, for instance, that "U.S. citizens spent 3.75 trillion minutes on the phone during 1987" (1992a: 3). Hopper traces the historical evolution of the telephone and the ways that face-to-face talk differ from telephone talk, and then introduces conversation analysis and argues why it is a particularly helpful approach for understanding communication on the phone.

The heart of the book is an explication of telephone talk in terms of its interactional processes. Drawing upon his own work, as well as related conversation analytic work, Hopper describes the canonical form for telephone openings, considers summons and answers, and how identification and recognition work, examines how switchboards and call answering shape telephone exchanges, and investigates the influences of relationships between callers and national culture. In addition, he looks at turn-taking, overlaps, and interruptions in telephone conversation, and considers how speakers project transition relevance places. Toward the book's end, Hopper analyzes play episodes on the phone, considers how telephone technology is transforming people's relationships, and identifies implications of the study for people's everyday telephone conduct.

The central news of Hopper's study is its explication and extension of key conversation analytic ideas in the context of telephone conversations. Conversation analysis (e.g. Atkinson and Heritage 1984; Boden and Zimmerman 1991; Schegloff and Sacks 1973), more than any other discourse approach, has been adopted (and adapted) by communications scholars. In turn, communication researchers⁶ have contributed to the growing body of knowledge about the interactional structures of conversation, and members' sense-making practices. For instance, communication research has offered analyses of: (1) features of turn-taking (Drummond and Hopper 1993; Thomason and Hopper 1992); (2) conversational repair (Zahn 1984), (3) specific adjacency pairs (Beach and Dunning 1982; Pomerantz 1988); (4) laughter's interactional work (Glenn 1989, 1991/2); (5) discourse makers such as "okay" (Beach 1993, 1995) and "I don't know" (Beach and Metzger 1997); (6) how marital couples' storytelling practices enact them as an intimate unit (Mandelbaum 1987, 1989); and (7) how stigmatized individuals do "being ordinary" (Lawrence 1996).

In addition, there is a growing interest in extending the typical focus on vocal and language features of talk to considerations of the way interaction is physically embodied, performed, and materially situated (e.g. Goodwin and Goodwin 1986; Goodwin 1995; Hopper 1992b; LeBaron and Streeck 1997, *in press*; Streeck 1993), and in extending study of conversation processes in informal conversation to medical and therapy settings (e.g. Morris and Chenail 1995; Pomerantz et al. 1997; Ragan 1990; Robinson 1998). Too, studies of institutional talk in Communication display a greater concern about the consequences of action, thereby giving them a somewhat different flavor from other conversation analytic work (e.g. Bresnahan 1991, 1992).

As noted earlier, discourse analytic work within communication has been occurring within an intellectual milieu where methodological practices are contested. As a result, discourse scholars have worked to explicate the method and substance of conversation analysis (Hopper et al. 1986; Nofsinger 1991; Pomerantz and Fehr 1997) and argue for its value in comparison with other methods. Hopper and Drummond (1990), for instance, showed how close studies of talk reveal a rather different picture of relationships than what scholars get when they have people give accounts of what caused a relationship break-up, and Beach (1996) shows how knowledge about grandparent care-giving and health problems like bulimia can be enhanced by incorporating conversation analytic methods within surveys and interviews. Too, colloquia in journals have explored methodological controversies surrounding the value of conversation analysis (CA) versus quantitative coding (Cappella 1990; Jacobs 1990; Pomerantz 1990), whether CA can be combined with quantitative coding (Wieder 1993), the most persuasive ways to make discourse claims (Jackson 1986; Jacobs 1986), the combining of ethnographic methods with conversation analysis (Hopper 1990/1), and the legitimacy and meaning of different kinds of "context" in analysis (Tracy 1998).

2.2 *Accounting (Buttny)*

Richard Buttny (1993) introduces his study of social accountability in communication by highlighting how calls for accounts and the offering of them are transformative discursive practices. Because communicators are moral beings who hold themselves and others accountable for actions, the study of accounting offers a window on a culture's "folk logic of right action" (1993: 2). The study of accounts has been an area of lively intellectual activity in communication. To a large degree, however, it had been conducted within an empiricist metatheoretical frame (Bostrom and Donohew 1992) that used quantitative coding and statistical analysis to reveal relationships among kinds of people, features of situations, and types of accounts (e.g. Cody and McLaughlin 1990). Buttny highlights the problematic nature of studying accounts in this way, and argues for an alternative methodological approach, what he labels "conversation analytic constructionism." His book provides a philosophical exploration of what this approach means and guidance about how to do it. Conversation analytic constructionism shares many similarities with conversation analysis. It studies naturally occurring talk and grounds claims in recipient responses. But in response to the rather straightforward readings of recipients' interactional meanings that CA offers, constructionism presumes meaning is socially constructed (and hence always carries potential to be otherwise).

The heart of Buttny's book is its analysis of accounting episodes in couples therapy, a Zen class, and welfare and news interviews (see also Buttny 1996; Buttny and Cohen 1991). Also explored are the relationships among accounting and emotion talk. A key way that Buttny's work differs from most conversation analytic research is that it explicitly situates itself in an interpretive social constructionist frame (for reviews see Pearce 1995; Shotter 1993). This metatheoretical exploration gives a self-consciously reflective flavor to the research absent in CA studies.

Other discourse studies about accounting explore: (1) functions of accounts (Morris et al. 1994), (2) the structure of episodes (Hall 1991), (3) how a person's calling for an account can itself become a disputed issue (Morris 1988), (4) how accounts change over time (Manusov 1996), (5) their occurrence in particular institutions such as service encounters (Iacobucci 1990), and (6) issues that arise when speakers are accounting for success (Benoit 1997). Accounts are but one kind of problematic, morally implicative event, but many others have also been studied. Talk about emotion and feelings in close relationships (Staske 1998) and in emergency service calls (Tracy and Tracy 1998b), relational and identity issues involved in computer-mediated conversations (Baym 1996; Rintel and Pittam 1997), the interactional sensitivities in giving criticism (Tracy and Eisenberg 1990/1) or advice (Goldsmith and Fitch 1997), teasing (Alberts 1992; Yeddes 1996), how parents seek to regulate children's behavior (Wilson et al. 1997), positioning self in relation to God (Bruder 1998a, 1998b), and how college students use reported speech to talk about sensitive topics such as race on campus (Buttny 1997) have also been explored.

2.3 *Straight talk (Katriel)*

Dugri is a culturally specific form of speech in Israeli society that Tamar Katriel (1986) explores in her book *Talking Straight: Dugri Speech in Israeli Sabra Culture*. Rooted in the ethnography of communication tradition (Hymes 1974), Katriel traces the socially rich roots of *dugri* that led to its becoming an especially valued way of talk among Israelis of European descent. *Dugri*, a term originally from Arabic that is now part of colloquial Hebrew, is used both to describe the act of speaking straight to the point, and as a label for an honest person who speaks in this way. Katriel illuminates how *dugri* takes its meaning from its being embedded in Zionist socialism, a system committed to making Zionist Jews everything that the Diaspora Jew was not. *Dugri* as a speech action is an assertion of character within a cultural group committed to fostering an egalitarian, socially responsible community. Katriel explores the meanings and functions of *dugri* within Israeli culture by focusing on its typical expressive forms, as well as its occurrence in several historically significant events. Throughout, Katriel shows how *dugri* relates to speech forms valued in other cultures and how it challenges politeness theory's (Brown and Levinson 1987) assumption that most talk is grounded in rules of considerateness.

The ethnography of communication tradition was brought into the communication field initially by Philipsen (1975, 1992, 1997) in his studies of the communicative code of Teamsterville, a working-class, urban, white community. This tradition has been extended in significant ways through Philipsen's students' studies of the enactment of personal relationships, address, directives, and leave-taking practices among

Colombians (Fitch 1991a, 1991b, 1994, 1998; Fitch and Sanders 1994), understanding of address forms and the activity of speaking in tongues in an American Christian community (Sequeira 1993, 1994), through studies of *griping* and *behibudin* (a ritualized sharing practice among children) in Israeli culture (Katriel 1991), and rules of self-expression in American life in work, play, and public arenas (Carbaugh 1988, 1996; Coutu in press; Hall and Valde 1995; Philipsen in press) and their differences with Soviet society (Carbaugh 1993).

In an overview of approaches to discourse analysis, Schiffrin (1994) treats ethnography of communication as one tradition of discourse analysis. Within communication, ethnography's identity is not so straightforward. While there is little dispute about the contribution that ethnography of communication studies makes to language and social interaction research, studies in this tradition are not usually regarded as discourse analysis. To the degree that an ethnography is evidenced through observation and informant interviews collected through field notes, a study will typically not be seen as discourse analysis. To the degree that an ethnography of communication study is evidenced through analysis of recorded and transcribed talk, it will be. Hybrid discourse analytic/ethnographic studies are increasingly common. From a disciplinary perspective, then, some of the studies noted above would more readily be judged ethnographies than discourse analysis. However, because discourse analysis in its larger interdisciplinary context (e.g. van Dijk 1997a, 1997b) is defined as much, if not more so, by topic (studies of language and social interaction) rather than method, it would be a serious oversight not to mention this work.

2.4 *Controlling others' conversational understandings* (Sanders)

Most people, at least some of the time, experience communication as problematic. The reason for this, Sanders (1987) argues, is that people have other purposes when they communicate than just expressing what they are thinking or feeling: "On at least some occasions, people communicate to affect others – to exercise control over the understandings others form of the communicator, the situation, their interpersonal relationships, the task at hand, etc., thereby to make different actions and reactions more or less likely" (1987: vii). How people do this is Robert Sanders's focus in *Cognitive Foundations of Calculated Speech*, a book that proposes a theory of strategic communication grounded in people's interpretive practices. Beginning with Grice's (1975) notion of conversational implicature and the work of speech act scholars (e.g. Austin 1962; Searle 1969), Sanders distinguishes three types of meaning that utterances can have. Simply put, an utterance's propositional content can be distinguished from the illocutionary act that it performs, and from the conversational implicatures that may be triggered. Typically, Sanders argues, while all of these meanings are available, only one is focal. How the particular level (and content) of meaning becomes focal depends on specific choices a speaker makes about wording construction and delivery. Wording an utterance one way will constrain a fellow conversationalist from offering responses that a speaker does not want to get, and channels him or her toward desired other responses. This constraining (channeling) process is never more

than partial, but it is the communicative resource that every communicator seeks to use as an exchange unfolds to accomplish his or her preferred goals. Thus while every utterance constrains what may reasonably follow, subsequent actions may cause prior utterances to be reinterpreted.

The key challenge in a theory of meaning-making, as Sanders sees it, is to identify how relatively stable aspects of meaning are acted upon by the shaping and changing power of context (especially prior utterances). A set of forecasting principles which communicators use to make decisions about what to say next is identified. Sanders draws upon a range of procedures to assess his theory. In addition to using hypothetical examples and experiments that assess interpretive preferences for utterance sequences, the principles are applied to a range of interpersonal and public conversations and written texts. Through analysis of multiple instances of very different kinds of discourse, the broad applicability of the theory is displayed. In this regard, like studies in the ethnography of communication tradition, Sanders's work would be regarded as a methodological hybrid that is part discourse analytic (see also Sanders 1984, 1985). Studies that combine discourse analysis and quantitative coding are in fact a common methodological hybrid (e.g. Tracy and Eisenberg 1990/1; Villaume et al. 1997).

Another line of communication research centrally informed by speech act theorizing comprises studies of argumentative discourse. Van Eemeren et al. define argumentation as the use of "language to justify or refute a standpoint, with the aim of securing agreement in views" (1993: 208). Making of an argument, then, is conceived as performing a complex speech act in which the propositional content of the act can be specified, as well as its sincerity and preparatory conditions. Texts whose arguments have been analyzed include advertisements (Jacobs 1995), divorce mediation proceedings (Aakhus 1995), interviews with police officials (Agne and Tracy 1998), school board elections (Tracy in press), college classes in critical thinking (Craig 1998; Craig and Sanusi in press), and group decision-making occasions that are mediated by computers (Aakhus 1998; Brashers et al. 1995). More explicitly than in other discourse traditions, studies of argumentative discourse meld empirical description with normative theorizing. As linguist Cameron (1995) has argued, language use not only is, but should be conceptualized as, a normative practice. A normative stance undergirds studies of argumentative discourse, and within this tradition the focus is on assessing the practical usefulness and moral reasonableness of different normative proposals (Jacobs and Jackson 1983; van Eemeren et al. 1993).

Understanding how discourse links to speakers' interactional goals, a primary focus in Sanders's work, also has received considerable attention, both in general theoretical conceptions (e.g. Bavelas 1991; Craig 1986; Mandelbaum and Pomerantz 1991; Sanders 1991; Tracy 1991; Tracy and Coupland 1990) and in particular contexts; for example, intergenerational conversations (Coupland et al. 1991a, 1991b).

Sanders's work reflects an interest in philosophy of language issues that have been the focus of attention within pragmatics research in linguistics. Other links with pragmatics by communication researchers include studies of conversational cohesion and coherence (Craig and Tracy 1983; Ellis 1992; Ellis and Donohue 1986; Penman 1987), and analyses of speech acts of different types such as requests (Bresnahan 1993; Craig et al. 1986) or complaints (Alberts 1988a, 1988b). Studies that tap into Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and more broadly Goffman's (1967) notion of

facework are especially numerous (see Ting-Toomey 1994; Tracy 1990 for reviews). Linnell and Bredmar (1996) examine facework in the talk between midwives and expectant mothers, Penman (1990, 1991) in courtroom interrogation, Beck (1996) in debates, and Tracy and Tracy (1998a) in 911 emergency calls. At the broadest level Haslett (1987) has argued that adopting a functional pragmatic perspective would enrich the field's studies of children's communication development, classroom interaction, and issues in intimate relationships.

2.5 *Academic colloquium (Tracy)*

A last example of discourse work within communication is to be seen in a study of my own about the dilemmas of academic scholarly talk (Tracy 1997a).⁷ Discussing ideas and debating issues is a common activity and a taken-for-granted good in academic life. In typical characterizations of this speech activity, though, people are invisible – ideas “have it out with each other.” *Colloquium* views the problems of academic talk from the vantage of its participants: “What worries do faculty and graduate students bring to this occasion? What problems do participants face as they talk with each other? How are problems made visible in talk and given attention through talk?” (1997: 3). Using tape-recorded presentations and discussions from weekly colloquia in a PhD program, and interviews with graduate students and faculty participants, *Colloquium* explores the host of dilemmas that confront participants in their institutional and interactional roles. As presenters, for instance, faculty members and graduate students needed to make decisions about how closely to position themselves in relation to the ideas about which they talked. Close positioning – done through mention of tangible by-products of intellectual work such as articles or grants, or time references that made apparent lengthy project involvement – acted as a claim to high intellectual ability and therein licensed difficult questions and challenges. More distant positioning made a presenter's making of errors and inability to handle certain intellectual issues more reasonable, but became increasingly problematic the higher one's institutional rank (beginning versus advanced graduate student, assistant versus full professor).

In their role as discussants, participants struggled with how to challenge supportively: how could participants pursue important intellectual issues yet avoid contributing to others' humiliation? The conversational dilemma faculty and graduate students faced was that conversational moves that displayed a person to be taking an idea seriously were the same ones that might be used as evidence that a discussant was being self-aggrandizing or disrespectful. Dilemmas at the group level included managing emotion in intellectual talk, and fostering discussion equality among a group in which members varied considerably in experience and expertise.

In sum, *Colloquium*: (1) analyzed the problems that confronted a group of academics in their roles as graduate students and faculty, presenters and discussants, and group members; (2) described the conversational practices that made problems visible and the strategies used to manage them; and (3) identified the normative beliefs this group of academics held about how intellectual discussion ought to be conducted. At the book's end are proposals about improving colloquia that seek to recognize the dilemmatic quality of the difficulties that confront participants.

In investigating academic colloquia I developed a hybrid type of discourse analysis that I named action-implicative discourse analysis (Tracy 1995). Like much communication work, action-implicative discourse analysis has roots in ideas from diverse traditions (in particular, politeness theory, conversation analysis, critical discourse approaches, and interactional sociolinguistics). In action-implicative discourse analysis, however, these ideas are blended for the purpose of addressing questions about people and talk that are prototypically “communicative.”⁸ What makes discourse research especially “communicative” is addressed in the next section.

A discourse-grounded dilemmatic approach to communicative problems is seen in studies of other institutional contexts as well. Naughton (1996), for instance, describes the strategies hospice team members use to manage the dilemma of displaying patient acceptance and making medically and professionally informed evaluations; Pomerantz et al. (1997) consider the interactional tensions faced by medical residents and their supervisors as they coordinate action in front of patients; te Molder (1995) analyzes dilemmas of government communicators who create and plan “information” campaigns; and Tracy and Anderson (1999) examine the delicate conversational dance citizens do when they call the police to report a problem with a person with whom they have a connection. Studies informed by a dilemmatic or dialectical frame are commonplace in nondiscourse traditions as well (see Baxter and Montgomery 1996; Rawlins 1992 for reviews).

3 Key Features of a Communication Take on Discourse Analysis

For communication researchers, then, discourse analysis is the close study of talk (or text) in context, a method that is to be distinguished from ethnographic field approaches (informant interviewing and participant observation) on the one hand, and laboratory and field-based coding studies on the other. Discourse analysis is situated within an interpretive social science metatheory that conceives of meanings as socially constructed, and needing to be studied in ways that take that belief seriously. It is: (1) empirical work, to be distinguished from philosophical essays about discourse; and (2) social scientific in world view and hence distinguishable from humanistic approaches to textual analysis (e.g. rhetorical criticism studies that analyze language and argument strategies in political speeches).

Discourse analysis provides communication researchers with a compelling way to study how people present themselves, manage their relationships, assign responsibility and blame, create organizations, enact culture, persuade others, make sense of social members’ ongoing interactional practices, and so on. Stated a bit differently, taking talk seriously has enabled communication researchers to reframe and address long-standing disciplinary concerns in powerful, persuasive new ways. By now, it should be obvious how ideas from intellectual traditions outside Communication have shaped discourse work within Communication. What may be less obvious is what Communication offers the interdisciplinary discourse community.

In the final section are described intellectual commitments, habits of mind if you will, common among communication researchers.⁹ None of the commitments is unique

to communication scholarship. Yet taken as a set, these intellectual practices and preferences create a perspective on discourse that is identifiably “communicative.” A communication perspective, I argue, brings issues into focus that are invisible or backgrounded in other disciplinary viewpoints. As such, a communicative perspective does not just apply ideas from other traditions, as occasionally has been asserted (e.g. Schiffrin 1994), but offers a valuable and distinct voice to the multidisciplinary conversation about discourse.

3.1 A preference for talk over written texts

That discourse analysts within communication privilege oral over written texts is not surprising given the history of the field. This does not mean there is no interest in written texts (e.g. Coutu in press; Tracy 1988), but it does mean that analyses of written discourse are the exception rather than the rule. The field’s strong preference for the study of oral texts foregrounds certain features of discourse that can more easily be backgrounded in studies of writing. Most notable is the way studying talk increases the visibility of people as part of what is being studied – there is no way to study talk apart from persons speaking and being spoken to. Discourse analysis in Communication is the study of people talking with each other.

Typically, fields define themselves more broadly than they actually practice. In Communication, for instance, although there are no good intellectual reasons, discourse analysts typically focus on adults rather than children (cf. Barnes and Vangelisti 1995), English speakers rather than other language speakers (cf. Hopper and Chen 1996), and persons with normal communicative capacities rather than those with disorders (cf. Goodwin 1995). Moreover, because discourse analytic studies began in interpersonal communication – an area of the field that distinguishes itself from organizational and mass communication – there has been relatively little attention to talk in business settings (cf. Taylor 1993), the focal site for organizational communication study, or in mass media contexts (cf. Nofsinger 1995).

3.2 Audience design and strategy as key notions

That talk is produced in particular situations for specific aims addressed to particular others is taken for granted as important to consider in Communication studies. Put a bit differently, taking account of audience – whether the audience be a single conversational partner, a small working group, or an ambiguously bounded public – is regarded as crucial for understanding people’s discourse practices. Moreover, many of Communication’s questions concern how an audience shapes what gets said. That texts of all types are designed for audiences is not a claim that anyone is likely to contest, but it is a fact often ignored in research practice. The influence of conversation analysis in Communication, over other discourse approaches, and in contrast to its more limited influence in its home discipline of sociology, can be understood as arising from its taking this disciplinary commonplace seriously. With its conception of talk as recipient-designed, and the commitment to grounding claims about meaning

in a recipient's response, conversation analysis has offered communications scholars a compelling way to study what they "knew" was important.

In addition to the notion that talk is directed to an audience, there is a related assumption that people are crafting their talk to accomplish their aims given the other and the character of the situation. Although structure and strategy are deeply connected (Craig and Tracy 1983; Schiffrin 1994), it is the strategic aspect of talk that is most interesting to communication researchers. Thus, communication researchers tend to think of talk occasions as situations that could have been played out in other ways. Communicators are choice-making, planning actors confronting uncertain situations and seeking to shape what happens in ways that advance their concerns. Questions to which communication researchers repeatedly return include: (1) "What identity, task, or relationship functions are served for a speaker by talking in this way rather than that?" and (2) "What are the advantages and disadvantages of selecting one strategy versus another?"

A rhetorical approach to discourse is not unique to communication. The sociologist Silverman (1994), for instance, implicitly adopts this stance in his study of patients telling counselors why they have come in for HIV testing. A group of British social psychologists (Billig 1987; Edwards and Potter 1992; Potter 1996) have argued explicitly for such an approach. But while taking a rhetorical stance is radical for psychologists, it is mainstream in communication. Admittedly, not all communication researchers see the value of looking closely at talk (preoccupation with minutiae), but few question the value of conceptualizing communication as a strategic activity.

3.3 "Problematic" situations as most interesting

Certain kinds of communicative tasks elicit relatively uniform responses, (e.g. describing an apartment); others reveal considerable individual differences (O'Keefe 1991). It is situations that social actors experience as problematic, where individuals respond differently – for example, accounting for a problem, reacting to someone else's, giving advice – that are most interesting for communication researchers. Communication scholars' interest in the problematic is displayed in the attention given to conflict and persuasion situations, as well as their visible concern about multiple-goal and dilemmatic occasions. Moreover, it is in situations where most people, or more accurately most members of a culture, do not respond in identical ways that evaluation of action is likely to become focal. When responses are not uniform, it becomes possible (and typical) to consider whether one kind of response, rather than another, does a better job of promoting relational satisfaction, minimizing group conflict, getting compliance, fostering involvement in a group decision, and so on. In such situations, a person or group's conversational choices (i.e. strategies) will be consequential.

Communication scholars study problematic situations both from the perspective of the situated actor and from that of detached observers. It is the actor perspective, however, that is less common in other intellectual traditions (Pearce 1995). An actor perspective takes seriously looking at talk through participants' eyes. The "participants' eyes" that are of interest, though, are not just immediate participants in their here-and-now particularity. That is, it is not only an interest in how people are locally making sense and acting but how they *could be* that is a particularly Communication

impulse. It is in the space between what is typically done, and what might rarely be done but nonetheless is possible, that novel, interesting, and effective strategies are to be created or discovered.

3.4 *An explicitly argumentative writing style*

All scholarly writing is about making arguments, but not all academic writing is explicitly argumentative. An explicitly argumentative style, to identify just a few features, is one that uses a greater frequency of first person voice (I argue) rather than third person (the author found) or impersonal voice (the data show), uses verbs that locate agency in the author rather than the data, and treats a large range of methodological and theoretical matters as “decisions” requiring justification, rather than as procedures to be described. The counterpoint to an explicitly argumentative style is one that seeks to be descriptive, framing what a researcher is doing as reporting rather than persuading. A descriptive style is expected when members of a community understand the significance of an action, issue, or person similarly. There is no surer way to mark oneself as a novice or outsider to a community than to argue for what is regarded as obvious. Similarly, to provide no evidence for assertions a community regards as contentious is a sign of ignorance of some type. An argumentative stance is expected when one is dealing with issues that members of a targeted group regard as debatable. Stated a bit differently, an argumentative style legitimates other views of the world – it frames an issue as something others may see differently. Effective scholarly writing requires weaving descriptive and argumentative moves together. But the characteristic way this is done – the relative frequency of descriptive and argumentative devices – tends to differ according to scholarly disciplines (Bazerman 1988). In a study I did (Tracy 1988) comparing journal articles from four intellectual traditions (discourse processing, conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, and communication), the communication report used the most explicitly argumentative style. The use of a relatively explicit argumentative style is a marker of Communication work.

At a practical level, the argumentative style can be attributed to the intellectual diversity within Communication. There are few things that everyone in the discipline would give assent to. Because of this diversity it is necessary to use a more explicitly argumentative style than is displayed in other disciplines. However, the argumentative writing style is not merely a practical necessity, it is the embodiment of a disciplinary attitude toward people. A writing style that is relatively argumentative does two things. First, it treats a larger range of others as audience. Since “givens” begin to disappear as one moves across intellectual traditions, explicit arguing is a way of informing others they are included among the addressed. Additionally, to the degree the argumentative style extends to the people and practices about whom an author writes, research participants are treated as reflective agents who weigh alternatives and make choices rather than as “subjects” whose discursive behavior is being explained. In sum, while an explicitly argumentative style has disadvantages – most notably, slowing intellectual progress to deliberate about issues that on particular occasions might better be ignored – it is consistent with a valuing of different perspectives, and it is an impulse that is strong in Communication work.

3.5 Viewing talk as practical and moral action

Talk is not just a phenomenon to be scientifically described and explained, it is moral and practical action taken by one person toward others. Talk not only can be evaluated, but should be. Just as people in their everyday lives are inescapably evaluating their own and others' actions, so, too, do scholars have a responsibility to take the moral and practical dimensions of talk seriously. It would be inaccurate to say that viewing talk as practical and moral action is a dominant view among communication researchers. Many, like their linguistic counterparts, define themselves as scientists whose job it is to describe and explain their phenomena, and, as best as possible, to keep values out of their work and avoid "prescribing."

Yet while the scientific view may still be dominant in Communication, there are changes afoot. Intellectual streams are fast becoming rivers. Normative theorizing – theories that consider what ought to be, as well as what is – have long been part of the field. Rhetorical humanistic work, by definition, takes a critical stance toward discursive objects and involves a normative component, as do critical studies of organizational life (Deetz 1992). In studies of argumentative practices and small group decision-making, there has been considerable theorizing considering how practices ought to be conducted.

Robert Craig (Craig 1989, 1992, 1995, 1999; Craig and Tracy 1995) has argued that the discipline of Communication should think of itself as a "practical" rather than a scientific one. Craig's notion of "practical" has some features in common with the area in linguistics labeled "applied." Gunnarsson defines applied linguistics as having the goal "to analyze, understand, or solve problems relating to practical action in real-life contexts" (1997: 285). Craig's view of Communication as a practical discipline also regards problems as the starting point for research. But what distinguishes Craig's model from Gunnarsson's description of applied linguistic work is practical theory's assumption that problems are not self-evident things. To the contrary, the most difficult and important part of the research process is defining the problems of a practice. Whose view of the difficulties should be taken? How should people's notions about "the problem" be put together? Since definitions of problems invariably imply blame and responsibility for change, defining "the problem" is highly consequential. Moreover, defining problems well is more than a matter of empirical observation. Good problem definitions require careful thought about the likely moral and practical consequences of defining problems one way rather than another. As Craig notes in the preface to an edited volume about social approaches to the study of communication:

[S]ocial approaches imply that communication research has an active role to play in cultivating better communicative practices in society. The responsibility of such roles follows from the *reflexivity* inherent in our research practices. . . . Communication is not a set of objective facts just simply "out there" to be described and explained. Ideas about communication disseminated by researchers, teachers, and other intellectuals circulate through society and participate in social processes that continually influence and reshape communication practices. Our choice, as interpersonal scholars, is not ultimately *whether* to participate in those processes but *how* to participate. We should be asking not just what communication *is*, but also what it *should* be. If we're going to help make it, let's at least try to make it better. (Craig 1995: ix)¹⁰

4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have spoken for my diverse, squabbling family. I have “described” what discourse analytic research looks like in Communication. This describing has, of course, involved selection. In essence I have taken a single photograph from the family album, enlarged it, framed it, and talked about it as “discourse analysis in communication.” I have worked to select a picture most family members would regard as reasonable, but given the family is large, I have had to make decisions about whose faces (arms, feet) could be occluded or left fuzzy, and whose should be big and clear. To push this photography analogy just a bit further, let me conclude by giving my reasons for choosing this particular snapshot. From my perspective, this image of “discourse analysis in Communication” is a nice one because it shows the importance of neighbors and friends in Communication’s definition of itself, because it highlights features that are distinctively “Communication,” therein making it easy to spot a Communication person in a crowd, and because it should make evident why Communication is a lively and interesting family that others would benefit from getting to know better.

NOTES

My thanks to the faculty members and graduate students in the discourse data group at the University of Colorado, and Kristine Fitch and the graduate students in the discourse analysis seminar (summer 1997) at the University of Iowa, for helpful comments.

- 1 To make the chapter more readable, the word “communication” is capitalized when it refers to the academic field of study (Communication), and is in lower case when it refers to the everyday activity or communication as a topic.
- 2 Within the field there is an important distinction between “communication,” without the “s,” and “communications,” with the “s”. Communications with an “s” is used to refer to mass communications (media-related areas). Communication in the singular is the preferred term for other areas of the field. A person’s command (or lack thereof) of this

distinction is a marker of discipline knowledge.

- 3 Some years ago Levinson (1983) made a distinction between conversation analysis and discourse analysis. At that point in time the distinction was a reasonable one, although even then not completely accurate (e.g. Gumperz 1982a, 1982b). Analyses of talk were limited, and without major distortion could be divided into those that began with more formal structures (speech acts) and those that began with “unmotivated looking” and a concern about interactional structure. In the ensuing years there has been an enormous growth in discourse studies where this simple dichotomy no longer very well captures the intellectual terrain. Many of these new approaches have been strongly influenced by conversation analysis (CA), but are not addressing the kinds of questions that have been

focal in CA. Thus, although this distinction is still used by some scholars, and particularly by conversation analysts, I do not make the distinction. Instead, like Schifffrin (1994) I treat discourse analysis as an umbrella term, and conversation analysis as one particular kind of discourse analysis, characterized both by a specific set of questions about social life and by a distinct method of analysis.

- 4 "Naturally occurring talk" is not a transparent category but has been an issue of debate. Are interviews naturally occurring talk? Do conversations generated in laboratory simulations count? These are ongoing concerns among communication researchers, with people taking different positions.
- 5 There is increasing convergence between texts that rhetoricians and discourse analysts take as objects of study. Some rhetoricians study everyday exchange forms (e.g. Hauser 1998) and discourse analytic studies of campaign or political oratory can be found (Tracy in press). However, in each case what is taken for granted differs. Rhetoricians tend to justify the reasonableness of focusing on the ordinary, "vernacular rhetoric" instead of rhetoric in its unmarked forms (i.e. speeches, debates), whereas discourse analysts would be likely to explicitly argue for the value of studying a public monologic text in contrast to the more typical interactive ones.
- 6 To decide whether a scholar is a communication researcher I considered (1) if the person received his or her PhD in a communication program, (2) if the person is/was a faculty member in a communication program, and (3) if the person publishes articles in the field and participates in its professional

conferences. For the vast majority of authors cited in this review, all three criteria apply; for some, however, only two apply. For instance, Chuck Goodwin and Anita Pomerantz are included as communication scholars. Goodwin received his PhD in a communication program but since graduate school has been in anthropology and linguistics departments; Pomerantz received her degree in sociology but for more than a decade and a half has been a faculty member in communication departments. Persons who attend national or international communication conferences or publish occasional papers in the field's journals without one, or both, of the other two criteria are not considered communication scholars. My classification means that there will be a small set of people that more than one discipline will claim as its own. In addition, co-authored work between scholars in different disciplines is treated as communication if at least one of the authors is a communication researcher.

- 7 Parts of the analysis in the book initially appeared as journal articles (Tracy and Baratz 1993, 1994; Tracy and Carjuzaa 1993; Tracy and Muller 1994; Tracy and Naughton 1994).
- 8 To say that my own work is prototypically communicative may seem self-aggrandizing. In making this claim I have no intention of implying a quality judgment. Quality is a different judgment than tradition typicality, which may or may not be a desirable feature. More than most communication scholars, however, I have been interested in articulating how discourse analysis by communication scholars is distinctively "communicative." That is, I have sought to articulate and

foster in my own work the intellectual moves that are valued and commonplace in Communication while shaping these moves in ways that take advantage of the interesting work in other disciplines.

- 9 In describing what are central disciplinary impulses, I am offering a construction of "the field." This construction is crafted so that knowledgeable others would regard it

as a reasonable description of what is actually there. At the same time, "the description" is my attempt to regularize and strengthen impulses in the field that I find attractive while decreasing the influence of others.

- 10 The volume was addressed to interpersonal communication researchers and in the quote several references to communication actually said "interpersonal communication."

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