

highly controversial would more supporting evidence be necessary. One additional mitigating circumstance suggests itself. If during survey research in the field there is an opportunity to do more than simply attach questions to an omnibus, it pays to map out and try to fill data requirements for several research projects at once.) If you find yourself with extra time in the field after all of your data needs have been met, resist the urge to gather more. Spend the time digesting what you have more thoroughly, or better yet, begin writing up your results.

The perils of gathering too much data are real, and underappreciated by most researchers. For those on a tight budget, it pays to remember that getting data back home is expensive, particularly in paper form. Thoroughly digested data, on the other hand, weigh less! In addition to being expensive, shipping masses of undigested data back home can seriously delay the beginning of the write-up phase, as time must be devoted to reading, digesting, and organizing.

Few researchers actually gather every piece of information they need in a single trip to the field. But it can be difficult to know exactly what is missing until write-up begins. Researchers whose schedule and budget allow for return trips to the field will benefit from pausing after an initial round of data collection to take stock of real persistent data needs. But all researchers will be better able to resist the temptation to gather too much data if they act as if they will be returning to the field. Most research projects end up requiring less in the way of actual data than originally planned for. Even if a return trip seems necessary but is not possible, careful maintenance of contact addresses and phone numbers (as well as diligent writing of thank-you notes to survey respondents, interviewees, librarians, archivists, etc.) will often make it possible to access additional information remotely. Finally, remember that each individual research project, flawed and incomplete as it may be, makes up part of a larger research agenda that in its entirety can reflect a more complete view of the world.

---

## Symposium: Discourse and Content Analysis

**Yoshiko M. Herrera**

Harvard University  
*herrera@fas.harvard.edu*

**Bear F. Braumoeller**

Harvard University  
*bfbraum@fas.harvard.edu*

This symposium grew out of our own interests in content analysis (CA), discourse analysis (DA), and the diverse epistemological and methodological issues that a comparison of the two might raise.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the similar goals of the two techniques made us wonder whether some amalgamation of the two might produce a method that could incorporate the major strengths of each—or whether, conversely, their superficial similarities might mask an insurmountable ontological divide.

When John Gerring raised the possibility of a symposium on the subject for this newsletter, therefore, we were intrigued by the possibilities. We took the opportunity to do what, in our opinion, symposium editors should do: assemble a group of smart people and give them free rein to write about whatever they find interesting about their areas of expertise. We suggested as a starting point the general question of how discourse and content analysis are similar and how they differ; as expected, discussions along these lines led our contributors to a number of interesting additional topics, insights, questions, and (of course) disagreements.

Most of the contributors agree that discourse and content analysis differ in significant ways. The real question is the degree to which they differ—indeed, whether they are even comparable at all. We begin the symposium with a contribution by Cynthia Hardy, Bill Harley, and Nelson Phillips,

who very concisely outline the two methods, their differences and potential for overlap. The next three contributions—by Neta Crawford, Will Lowe, and Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes—discuss discourse analysis (Crawford, Laffey and Weldes) and content analysis (Lowe) separately and in greater detail. The final three contributions, by Ted Hopf, Kimberly Neuendorf, and Karin Fierke, more explicitly contrast the two methods. Some of the contributors employ an ideal-typical analysis in contrasting the differences between the two methods, but all of the contributors note that both DA and CA can be done using a variety of techniques, and some of the contributors even go so far as to outline specific techniques and innovations (e.g. Crawford, Lowe, and Laffey and Weldes).

To some extent the question of whether the methods are comparable is answered by four contributions that explicitly do so (Hardy et al., Hopf, Neuendorf, and Fierke). Hardy et al., for example, compare the two techniques across twelve dimensions. But beyond basic comparability, the question of how much overlap there actually is between the methods remains debatable. After presenting rather stark differences between the two methods, Hardy et al. come around to arguing that actually there can be a mixture between the two, and they outline possibilities for overlap in Table 2. Similarly, in making the case for stating the assumptions behind content analysis, Lowe points out that doing so is important both for its own sake (because we can't, or shouldn't, pretend that we don't have any) and because if assumptions are made explicit they can then be relaxed to fit particular research circumstances. One could apply this principle to the adjustment of CA assumptions toward DA assumptions outlined by Hardy et al. A slightly different take on the issue of overlap comes from Neuendorf, who argues for using qualitative and quantitative methods together, and while not necessarily arguing for a hybrid of DA and CA, suggests how the two can be comple-

mentary. Laffey and Weldes, however, argue more strongly than some of the others that, although there are some superficial similarities in technique, DA and CA are oriented toward different research goals: in particular, DA is fundamentally concerned with power relations and the situatedness of the meaning of language, both of which are outside the bailiwick of content analysis.

As this initial summary of the comparison of discourse and content analysis suggests, there was some disagreement on not just the definitions of discourse and content analysis, but the definition of discourse itself, and for that matter, the definition of language and text, as well as the related concept of practice. Laffey and Weldes provide a definition of discourse as the structures and practices that are used to construct meaning in the world. Similarly, Crawford argues that discourse is “the content and construction of meaning and the organization of knowledge in a particular realm.” These definitions are remarkably unlike Lowe’s definition of discourse as a “probabilistic content analysis model” or in other words, “a theory of what is more or less likely to be said, and of what the conceptual elements are that generate and constrain these possibilities.” There is some overlap here insofar as Laffey and Weldes argue that particular discursive practices and structures make certain representations possible; one could reasonably ask whether for what practitioners of DA understand as “conditions of possibility,” their CA colleagues might reasonably substitute “necessary conditions,” or “some  $X$  s.t.  $\Pr(Y|\neg X)=0$ ”—an underlying conceptual construct ( $X$ ) without which the expression of a given word or phrase ( $Y$ ) is impossible. Arguably, the first formulation is constitutive—in that Laffey and Weldes emphasize that discourse is not just a particular collection of words, but a constitutive set of structures and practices, that do not merely reflect thoughts or realities, but rather structure and constitute them—and the second is causal, but from a methodological point of view it only matters whether the empirical implications are the same, and in this case, they seem to be.<sup>2</sup>

Another way of thinking about the definition of discourse is to enquire about the meaning of language; this issue was raised by Fierke, as well as by Neuendorf and Laffey and Weldes. Is language simply a reflection of reality (be it objective or intersubjective), or is language itself constitutive of reality? Fierke argues that in the former ontology is separate from epistemology, whereas in the latter they are connected because the way that one comes to know the world determines what that world is, at least from the point of view of theory.

The discussion of competing definitions and comparability of discourse and content analysis thus far has already raised several deeper questions that arise out of or inform these discussions. The first is the issue of how to understand the relationship among ontology, epistemology, and methodology; in other words, what are the connections among the nature of reality, the ways in which we come to know it, and the tools we use to do so? Are these connections logically necessary or merely habitual? Second is the question of whether and, if so, how discourse and content analysis fit

into positivism and the scientific method. A third question concerns the issue of how to accommodate, methodologically, the dynamism of socially constructed meanings and changing realities. Finally, a fourth question concerns the role of power relations, both in our subject matter and in our analyses.

### **Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology**

Issues of fundamentally different ontologies and epistemologies arise often. This issue famously informed Friedrich Kratochwil and John Gerard Ruggie’s (1986) critique of regime analysis, namely, that the (positivist) epistemology of regime analysis fundamentally contradicted the (intersubjective) ontology of regimes themselves. The basic issue was that “the different approaches construe the social world differently—just as Newtonian mechanics and quantum mechanics do in the physical world” (Ruggie [1998, 86]; see also Kratochwil and Ruggie [1986, 764–66]). At the same time, other analyses suggest strongly that there is no necessary link between ontology and epistemology or method: even Clifford Geertz demonstrated the link between the Balinese cockfight and Balinese culture more generally, in part, via a statistical analysis of the structure of wagering (1973, pp. 429–30). The question of the compatibility of CA and DA often hinges on whether or not intersubjective processes are thought to produce objective empirical “footprints.”

Every one of the contributions to this symposium has commented on the relationship between ontology, epistemology, and methodology, and some, like Fierke’s, have further delineated methods from methodology, treating methods as discrete techniques and methodology as the combination of methods with positions on epistemological and ontological questions. The starting point of this debate is the issue of objectivity, and the related position on ontology. Whereas for many analysts using content analysis, the idea of a fixed and objective reality is acceptable, the embrace of the intersubjective construction and interpretation of reality is a core assumption of discourse analysis. Indeed, the analysis of subjectivity and mediation is one of the primary goals of discourse analysis, and is embodied in the attention to context.

The concept of context, or the situatedness of knowledge, suggests a second aspect in the ontology/epistemology/methodology debate, namely the relationship between epistemological and ontological positions, already alluded to above in the discussion of the definition of language. As Neuendorf points out, the question of epistemology for content analysis is relatively straightforward: the positivist scientific method is how we know things. In contrast, Fierke argues that the necessity of understanding context in discourse analysis stems from a refusal to separate ontology and epistemology: what we know is not separable from the method in which we came to know it. Laffey and Weldes, as well as Crawford and Hopf, also argue that discourse analysis unites epistemology to ontology in that DA asks how we came to know the representations (words, phrases, language, gestures, etc.) that we claim constitute reality. Similarly,

Neuendorf also argues that for discourse analysis one needs the subjective interjections of the analyst; quoting Phillips and Hardy (2002, p. 83), she writes that “there are no unmediated data.” Fierke, in contrast, calls into question the common perception that DA is subjective: she claims that it is in fact potentially more objective than CA because it is less dependent on categories pre-chosen by the analyst, and thus subject to his or her interpretation. Some scholars see the mediation of data as something that must be acknowledged but minimized at much as possible. On the other hand some, like Crawford, argue that researchers should advance some types of mediation, for example in trying to be “empathetic” with the analytic subject’s point of view.

This position on the inseparability of ontology and epistemology brings up the third question regarding the relationship of methods or methodology to epistemological and ontological positions, to wit: Can methodology be separated from epistemology and ontology, and if so, does one come first, or is one determinative of the other? In the specific context of DA and CA, does using a particular method determine what is knowable? Lowe, paraphrasing Alexander Wendt, argues that methodology underdetermines epistemology—in other words, the methods we use do not solely determine what we can know. Others, notably Laffey and Weldes, are not convinced that methodology can be separated from epistemology. Hopf provides a somewhat different perspective on this debate in arguing that “epistemology and ontology trump methodology.” By this he means that rather than solving the question of what reality is and what is knowable via better methods, we must acknowledge the limits of our certainty about what is knowable and what reality is. In other words, researchers must be circumspect in their claims, regardless of their methods.

Another way to think about points raised in this ontological, epistemological and methodological debate is to acknowledge that theoretical content is often derived from the methods we use. While some might hope that the choice of methods could be “theory-free,” meaning that methodological choices would not impose particular theories on researchers, in reality, theories are often based on a set of implicit assumptions derived from the methodology with which the researcher is most familiar. That is, rather than hypotheses being based on the researcher’s hunches about what makes the world go around, certain methods in themselves may make particular theories likely to be the focus of analysis. Of course some methodological techniques were designed with certain classes of theories in mind, and so in some cases the relationship may be intentional. But nevertheless, the debate over the relationship of ontological, epistemological and methodological positions reminds us that we should be aware of the potential theoretical content of the methods we use.

### **Positivism and Scientific Methodology**

Related of course to the question of the relationship between epistemology, ontology, and methodology in discourse and content analysis is the issue of how discourse analysis and content analysis are related to positivism and scientific meth-

odology. In particular, a question that comes up in several contributions to the symposium is whether CA and DA are positivist. Some contributors, e.g. Hardy et al., Lowe, and Neuendorf, argue that content analysis either is positivist or can be usefully constructed as a positivist inference process. Indeed, Lowe’s objective is not to argue in favor of positivism, because he seems to take for granted the utility of positivist methods for social science. Rather, his task is to consider the relationship between CA and positive quantitative analysis, and argue that CA should be part of the quantitative fold. It is intriguing to note that Lowe considers CA to be currently outside of statistical mainstream—although he argues persuasively that it should not be—while others in the symposium consider CA to be orthodox statistical positivism. Moreover, if CA is, or is to become, part of mainstream quantitative analysis, is DA already part of, or should it be part of, mainstream qualitative analysis? These corollary questions were not addressed by the contributors but are worthy of further consideration.

Another question raised by the association of CA with positivism is whether the association is ironclad. Hardy et al., after positing CA as positivist, outline ways in which CA and DA methods can be mixed so as to call into question its positivist assumptions. But if we agree that CA is not necessarily positivist, one wonders whether the corollary assertion (that DA is necessarily non-positivist) also holds. While several contributors have given examples of ways in which CA may be done in a non-positivist manner, it is an interesting thought experiment to consider whether DA is fundamentally non-positivist (a position espoused, at least implicitly, by some of the contributors) or whether some versions of DA might plausibly be “positivizable.” As there are already many existing varieties of both DA and CA, these questions are answerable in different ways, depending on the type of DA or CA that one chooses to use.

Related to the question of positivism is the question of whether CA or DA are necessarily quantitative or formal. While the immediate response might be to simply dichotomize CA as quantitative and formal and DA as non-quantitative and non-formal, consideration of actual techniques suggests room for overlap. For example, Hardy et al. point out similarities between the two techniques, and Laffey and Weldes also acknowledge this point, although they argue the similarity is only superficial compared to the different goals of, as well as assumptions behind, CA and DA research.

The quantitatively inclined will find that attempting to parse the sorts of relationships described by DA into formal statistical terms produces interesting thought experiments. For example, Laffey and Weldes describe discourses as “sets of rules that both enable practices and are reproduced and/or transformed by them.” The statement that rules enable practices would seem only to eliminate the possibility of certain practices in the absence of certain rules, not to make any predictions about the frequency of those practices in their presence. The production and reproduction of rules and practices would suggest severe and possibly intractable endogeneity issues: error terms in time-series models with

multiple dependent variables are rather complex—some, for example, incorporate multiple separate error terms to capture different sources of unexplained variation (e.g., contemporaneous shocks). The transformation of rules, moreover, suggests either that the relationship between rules and practices is not constant over time or that it is contingent upon some additional, unspecified factor. Despite the simplicity of the initial formulation, therefore, the associated statistical specification would have to be highly sophisticated in order to counteract a variety of threats to inference. These threats are no less present in qualitative analysis, of course. Moreover, some elements common to both kinds of analysis are given dramatically different interpretations by the contributors: whereas Lowe considers CA in terms of a probabilistic model, Hopf argues that one of the attributes of DA is that it specifically directs attention to absences and anomalies—phenomena most likely ignored or relegated to the error term in a probabilistic model. The point here is that, even if no quantified data will ever exist, constructing quantitative models of the processes described by qualitative methodologists might be a useful exercise: qualitative analysts could be made aware of threats to inference that they had not considered, and quantitative analysts might begin to produce methods that more closely capture the kinds of processes common to DA research.

The role of the analyst, while central to issue of subjectivity, may also be a place for overlap between CA and DA. Crawford notes that DA requires many choices on the part of the analyst, especially regarding the limits of the discourse. Indeed, the boundaries of the discourse, or the object of study, for those engaged in discourse analysis is not clearly and externally delineated. Hopf argues that DA in fact assumes an “open social system,” in the sense that there are overlapping webs of meaning with no obvious starting or end points of analysis. But despite the implicit goal of most statistical techniques to minimize the role of the researcher, it is also the case that any type of quantitative analysis, including CA, requires the analyst to make choices about the limits of what is or is not included in a model or data set. These choices matter substantially in the process of extracting meaning from text, regardless of the method used.

Indeed, given the necessity of scholarly understanding of a subject, even for CA, it is interesting to ask whether it is even possible, except in the crudest and most mindless ways, to do CA without some level of implicit DA as well. Neuendorf argues that one needs to do some DA before CA, in order to come up with coding guidelines, but one can push the question further to ask if DA and CA are inseparable or if there is an ordering in which one should come first. Another point of consideration is to what extent one can use CA techniques (methods) within discourse analysis methodology, or vice versa, i.e. DA techniques (methods) in a CA or positivist methodology. The contributors are split on these questions: Some argue that the methods can be used together or in a hybrid form, but others disagree.

Finally, the question of positivism and scientific methodology raises the issue of how both CA and DA address the

concepts of replication and validity.

Neuendorf argues that DA is more concerned with validity, while CA focuses more on reliability; others see less of a distinction in this regard. Lowe addresses this issue for CA, while Crawford makes the case that DA can be both rigorous and attentive to replication and validity issues. Hopf agrees with Crawford with regard to scientific rigor, validity and replicability and refuses to concede science to either positivism or CA, arguing instead that DA can be used to generate theories and test hypotheses in a scientific manner.

### **Change and Timeframes of Analysis**

A third set of questions that this symposium has raised has to do with time—notably, the question of how to address change over time as well as the appropriate timeframes of analyses. The issue of change over time is not unrelated to the earlier issue of ontological position: can reality be taken as fixed or is it fundamentally fluid? While realists and positivists would acknowledge that reality changes, the question is whether analysis of reality requires a constantly dynamic model—and, if so, whether the parameters of such a model can even be taken to be fixed. Laffey and Weldes suggest that attention to change over time is one difference between DA and CA, with DA being attentive to fluidity in meanings while CA assumes a static conception of reality; Fierke argues that this distinction may be “too stark.”

Moreover, while there may be difference in the choices that researchers make regarding this issue, it is clear that both DA and CA must nevertheless at some point posit enough stability to be able to acknowledge a baseline from which change can be measured. For example, to the extent that DA is interested in the construction of meaning, presumably the set of relevant meanings changes from one particular state to some other state; how else but by capturing meanings at multiple points in time can one claim that meanings have been constructed or changed? Thus, beyond the ontological difference, the difference in attention to the fluidity or reality or meanings may be a matter of emphasis rather than a substantive difference between DA and CA.

A second way in which DA and CA differ with regard to time, however, concerns the timeframe of the analysis of data. Whereas with CA the timeframe for each bit of data is relatively constant, as Crawford points out, in DA the researcher must “extend the time frame”—that is, investigate where the beliefs or ideas came from and how they changed, rather than just accepting them as they are at a particular time. This tracing of individual elements of an argument to different periods of time seems to be more common in DA than CA, but one could imagine adapting CA methods to accommodate this concern.



### Power

The last issue to consider in the difference between DA and CA is the way that each addresses issues of power and hierarchy. The way in which power relations structure, constrain, and produce systems of meaning is a fundamental concern of DA. Laffey and Weldes' concept of interpellation specifically addresses this through the investigation of subject positions, i.e. identities and power hierarchies. Similarly, in outlining DA methodology, Crawford argues that researchers must identify specific beliefs of dominant actors for a particular context. All other contributors to the DA discussion similarly note the importance of power considerations in DA. This concern should be acknowledged as a core contribution of DA, but we may still question whether power is exclusively the concern of DA, or whether power considerations could be integrated into CA and other types of qualitative or quantitative methodologies.

### Conclusion

It is clear, by virtue of their detailed responses to our unstructured initial query, that many of our contributors have thought quite a bit about the questions of the fundamental natures of CA and DA and which relationships might exist between them. We are happy to be able to offer their collected thoughts on the subject in the hopes that they will enlighten, provoke, and produce further discussion

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to Karin Fierke, Will Lowe, and Jutta Weldes for comments on an earlier draft. Errors of fact or interpretation remain our own.

<sup>2</sup> When faced with the prospect of rendering the kinds of statements about the world that DA produces in statistical terms, one might reasonably wonder what the point of such an exercise would be. There are, we think, two answers. The first, simply, is to permit generalization from a representative sample to a larger population. The second, elaborated below, is to take advantage of a substantial statistical literature on threats to inference, many of which might very well apply across methods.

### References

- Geertz, Clifford (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kratochwil, Friedrich, and John Gerard Ruggie (1986). "International Organization: A State of the Art on an Art of the State." *International Organization* 40(4): 753-775.
- Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ruggie, John G. 1998. *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalization*. London and New York: Routledge.

---

## Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis: Two Solitudes?

**Cynthia Hardy**

University of Melbourne  
chardy@unimelb.edu.au

**Bill Harley**

University of Melbourne  
bharley@unimelb.edu.au

**Nelson Phillips**

University of Cambridge  
n.phillips@jims.cam.ac.uk

In this essay, we outline the key features of discourse analysis, contrast it with content analysis, and then consider the extent to which these two methods can be seen as either complementary to, or in conflict with, each other. Our underlying premise is pluralist in that while we recognize that these two methods are based in very different philosophical camps and play very different roles in social science research, we also believe that they can be seen as complementary and even mutually supportive in the exploration of social reality. Furthermore, given the recent "linguistic turn" in social science and the related increasing interest in the study of texts of various kinds, the contrast between these two methods provides a particularly useful context in which to discuss assumptions about the nature of language and the role of linguistic methods in social research.

### Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a methodology for analyzing social phenomena that is qualitative, interpretive, and constructionist. It explores how the socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world were created and are held in place. It not only embodies a set of techniques for conducting structured, qualitative investigations of texts, but also a set of assumptions concerning the constructive effects of language (Burman & Parker, 1993). Discourse analysis differs from other qualitative methodologies that try to understand the meaning of social reality for actors (e.g. Geertz, 1977) in that it endeavors to uncover the way in which that reality was produced. So, while it shares a concern with the meaningfulness of social life, discourse analysis provides a more profound interrogation of the precarious status of meaning. Where other qualitative methodologies work to understand or interpret social reality as it exists, discourse analysis tries to uncover the way that reality is produced (Hardy, 2001; Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

Discourse analysis also presupposes that it is impossible to strip discourse from its broader context (Fairclough, 1995). Discourses have no inherent meaning in themselves and, to understand their constructive effects, researchers must

locate them historically and socially. The meanings of any discourse are “created, supported, and contested through the production, dissemination, and consumption of texts; and emanate from interactions between the social groups and the complex societal structures in which the discourse is embedded” (Hardy, 2001: 28).

Discourse analysis is thus more than a method: it is a methodology (Wood & Kroger, 2001) based on two primary assumptions. First, discourse analysis is founded on a strong social constructivist epistemology. Social reality is not something that we uncover, but something that we actively create through meaningful interaction. The study of the social thus becomes the study of how the objects and concepts that populate social reality come into being (Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, forthcoming).

Second, discourse analysis grows out of the belief that meaning, and hence social reality, arise out of interrelated bodies of texts – called discourses – that bring new ideas, objects and practices into the world. For example, the discourse of strategy has introduced a series of new management practices over the last fifty years (Knights and Morgan, 1991); the postwar discourse of human rights has brought about the contemporary idea of a refugee with rights to asylum (Phillips and Hardy, 1997); and the discourse of AIDS has empowered groups of patient-activists (Maguire et al., 2001). Discourses are thus “concrete” in that they produce a material reality in the practices that they invoke. Accordingly, a discourse is defined as a system of texts that brings objects into being (Parker, 1992). From this perspective, social science becomes the study of the development of discourses that support the myriad of ideas that make social reality meaningful. And, since discourses are embodied in texts (Chalaby, 1996), discourse analysis involves the systematic study of texts to find evidence of their meaning and how this meaning translates into a social reality (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

### **Highlighting Similarity; Recognizing Difference**

Content analysis, as it is traditionally employed, differs from discourse analysis quite profoundly even though it is similarly concerned with the analysis of texts. Most importantly, it adopts a positivistic approach – the fundamental activity is hypothesis testing using statistical analysis (Schwandt, 2001). At a practical level, it involves the development of analytical categories that are used to construct a coding frame that is then applied to textual data. Content analysis as a mode of textual analysis is characterized by a concern with being objective, systematic, and quantitative (Kassarjian, 2001: 9): objective in the sense that the analytic categories are defined so precisely that different coders may apply them and obtain the same results; systematic in the sense that clear rules are used to include or exclude content or analytic categories; and quantified in the sense that the results of content analysis are amenable to statistical analysis. Underlying this concern is the belief that the meaning of the text is constant and can be known precisely and consistently by different researchers as long as they utilize rigorous and correct analytical procedures (Silverman, 2001). Content analysis is the study of the text

itself not of its relation to its context, to the intentions of the producer of the text, or of the reaction of the intended audience.

While discourse analysis and content analysis are both interested in exploring social reality, the two methods differ fundamentally in their assumptions about the nature of that reality and of the role of language in particular. Where discourse analysis highlights the precarious nature of meaning and focuses on exploring its shifting and contested nature, content analysis assumes a consistency of meaning that allows for occurrences of words (or other, larger units of text) to be assumed equivalent and counted. Where discourse analysis focuses on the relation between text and context, content analysis focuses on the text abstracted from its contexts. On the surface, the difference between the two methods could not be more stark (see Table 1). While discourse analysis is concerned with the development of meaning and in how it changes over time, content analysis assumes a consistency of meaning that allows counting and coding. Where discourse analysts see change and flux, content analysts look for consistency and stability.

It is, however, worth pointing out that there are forms of content analysis that look much more like discourse analysis (Gephart, 1993). More qualitative forms of content analysis that do not assume highly stable meanings of words but, rather, include a sensitivity to the usage of words and the context in which they are used are compatible with discourse analysis and can, in fact, be used within a broad discourse analytic methodology in the analysis of social reality. In Table 2 we provide an indication of how content analysis might be used in a way that is compatible with discourse analysis. As one moves from simple counting to more complex interpretation, the two forms of analysis become increasingly compatible, although at the expense of positivist objectives. For content analysis to form part of a discourse analytic methodology, it is necessary to weaken the assumption that meaning is stable enough to be counted in an objective sense. From a discourse analytic perspective, all textual analysis is an exercise in interpretation and while clear exposition of the methods used to arrive at a particular interpretation is a hallmark of good research, it cannot remove the necessity for interpretation. With this proviso, content analysis can, through its focus on being systematic and quantitative, play a potentially useful role in expanding our understanding of the role of discourse in constructing the social.

In conclusion, while discourse analysis and content analysis come from very different philosophical bases, they can be complementary. Traditionally, the differences mean that they provide alternative perspectives on the role of language in social studies. In this regard, they are complementary in terms of what they reveal as a result of conflicting ontology and epistemology. This conflict can be most easily seen in the focus in content analysis on reliability and validity contrasting sharply with the focus on the interpretive accuracy and reflexive examination that characterizes discourse analysis. More interpretive versions of content analysis also complement discourse analysis in that they may be usefully com-

Table 1: Differences between Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis

	<b>Discourse Analysis</b>	<b>Content Analysis</b>
<b>Ontology</b>	Constructionist - assumes that reality is socially constructed	Realist - assumes that an independent reality exists
<b>Epistemology</b>	Meaning is fluid and constructs reality in ways that can be posited through the use of interpretive methods	Meaning is fixed and reflects reality in ways that can be ascertained through the use of scientific methods
<b>Data Source</b>	Textual meaning, usually in relation to other texts, as well as practices of production, dissemination, and consumption	Textual content in comparison to other texts, for example over time
<b>Method</b>	Qualitative (although can involve counting)	Quantitative
<b>Categories</b>	Exploration of how participants actively construct categories	Analytical categories taken for granted and data allocated to them
<b>Inductive/Deductive</b>	Inductive	Deductive
<b>Subjectivity/Objectivity</b>	Subjective	Objective
<b>Role of context</b>	Can only understand texts in discursive context	Does not necessarily link text to co
<b>Reliability</b>	Formal measures of reliability are not a factor although coding is still justified according to academic norms; differences in interpretation are not a problem and may, in fact, be a source of data	Formal measures of intercoder reliability are crucial for measurement purposes; differences in interpretation are problematic and risk nullifying any results
<b>Validity</b>	Validity in the form of "performativity" i.e., demonstrating a plausible case that patterns in the meaning of texts are constitutive of reality in some way.	Validity is in the form of accuracy and precision i.e., demonstrating that patterns in the content of texts are accurately measured and reflect reality
<b>Reflexivity</b>	Necessarily high - author is part of the process whereby meaning is constructed.	Not necessarily high - author simply reports on objective findings.

Table 2: Using Content Analysis within a Discourse Analytic Approach

<b>Dealing with Meaning</b>	There is no inherent meaning in the text; meanings are constructed in a particular context; and the author, consumer, and researcher all play a role. There is no way to separate meaning from context and any attempt to count must deal with the precarious nature of meaning.
<b>Dealing with Categories</b>	Categories emerge from the data. However, existing empirical research and theoretical work provide ideas for what to look for and the research question provides an initial simple frame.
<b>Dealing with Technique</b>	The categories that emerge from the data allow for coding schemes involving counting occurrences of meanings in the text. Analysis is an interactive process of working back and forth between the texts and the categories.
<b>Dealing with Context</b>	The analysis must locate the meaning of the text in relation to a social context and to other texts and discourses.
<b>Dealing with Reliability</b>	The results are reliable to the degree that they are understandable and plausible to others i.e. does the researcher explain how s/he came up with the analysis in a way that the reader can make sense of?
<b>Dealing with Validity</b>	The results are valid to the degree that they show how patterns in the meaning of texts are constitutive of reality.
<b>Dealing with Reflexivity</b>	To what extent does the analysis take into account the role that the author plays in making meaning? Does the analysis show different ways in which this meaning might be consumed? Is the analysis sensitive to the way the patterns are identified and explained.

bined in a single study: the more structured and formal forms of discourse analysis are compatible with the more interpretive forms of content analysis. Research is, from this perspective, an exercise in creative interpretation that seeks to show how reality is constructed through texts that embody discourses; in this regard, content analysis provides an important way to demonstrate these performative links that lie at the heart of discourse analysis.

### References

- Burman, E. and Parker, I. 1993. Against discursive imperialism, empiricism and constructionism: Thirty-two problems with discourse analysis. In *Discourse analytic research: Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action*, edited by E. Burman and I. Parker (pp. 155-172). London: New York.
- Chalaby, J.K. 1996. Beyond the prison-house of language: Discourse as a sociological concept. *British Journal of Sociology* 47(4): 684-698.
- Fairclough, N. 1995. *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London: Longman.
- Geertz, C. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York, NJ: Basic Books.
- Hardy, C. 2001. Researching organizational Discourse. *International Studies in Management and Organization* 31(3): 25-47.
- Kassarjian, H. H. (2001) Content analysis in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 4: 8-18.
- Knights, D. and Morgan, G. 1991. Strategic discourse and subjectivity: Towards a critical analysis of corporate strategy in organisations. *Organisation Studies* 12(3): 251-273.
- Maguire, S. Phillips, N. and Hardy, C. 2001. When "Silence = Death" keep talking: Trust, control and the discursive construction of identity in the Canadian HIV/AIDS treatment domain. *Organization Studies* 22: 287-312.
- Parker, I. *Discourse dynamics*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Phillips, N. and Hardy, C. 1997. Managing multiple identities: discourse, legitimacy and resources in the UK refugee system. *Organization* 4(2): 159-186.
- Phillips, N. and Hardy, C. 2002. *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction*, Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage Inc.
- Phillips, N., Lawrence, T. and Hardy, C. Forthcoming. Discourse and institutions. *Academy of Management Review*, forthcoming, 2004.
- Schwandt, T. 2001. *Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Silverman, D. 2001. *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wood, L.A. and Kroger, R.O. 2000. *Doing discourse analysis: Methods for studying action in talk and text*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

---

## Understanding Discourse: A Method of Ethical Argument Analysis\*

Neta C. Crawford

Brown University

Neta\_Crawford@brown.edu

In 1862 Bismark said, "The great questions of the age are not settled by speeches and majority votes . . . but by iron and blood. (Quoted in Shulze, 1998: 140)" While beautifully evocative, Bismark's reasoning raises more questions than his formulation answers. What are the great questions of an age? How do those preoccupations arise? If political argument is meaningless, or nearly so, why do actors engage in it? And if some issue is settled by force, what led individuals and nations to sacrifice their blood and treasure, their sons and daughters? Realists generally say that one of two factors typically explains the preoccupations of an age and the resort to force; humans are motivated by either material interests or the drive for the power necessary to secure their interests. We need look no deeper.

Yet there are obviously cases where actors disagree about their "interests," don't know their interests, or act contrary to a wish to enhance their power. For example, realists would have predicted that Great Britain keep its preeminent position as the world's largest slave trader in the 18th and 19th Century; yet the British ended their own participation in the trade in 1807 and spent millions in treasure and thousands of lives in blood over the next decades to suppress the trans-Atlantic slave trade. How did the slave trade and slavery, once taken for granted as good, just, virtuous and right for *both* master and slave, become stigmatized and eventually abhorred as illegitimate and human institutions? Such questions are about the meanings individuals and groups attach to practices and how those meanings change. Discourse analysis can help uncover the meanings that make the "great questions of an age" and underpin the dominant relations of power. Discourse and argument analysis can also help us understand how those meanings, and the social practices associated with them, change.

### Aims and Varieties of Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis assumes that discourse — the content and construction of meaning and the organization of knowledge in a particular realm — is central to social and political life. Discourses set the terms of intelligibility of thought, speech, and action. To understand discourses then is to understand the underlying logic of the social and political organization of a particular arena and to recognize that this arrangement and the structures of power and meaning underpinning it are not natural, but socially constructed. For example, contemporary western science is a discourse which assumes certain facts about the physical world and how we should come to both know it and manipulate it. That under-



standing has evolved, and is still evolving, while its content and evolution is related to other discourses in the social and political world. In other words, gender and racial discourses intersect with western scientific discourse. Further, the discourse of western science privileges some practices and actors, legitimizing them, and delegitimizes other practices and actors. For example, alchemists are derided and physicists are exalted.

Discourse analysis, which can help us decipher the underlying meaning, deep assumptions, and relations of power that are supported by and constructed through a discourse, can be done many different ways depending on the type of discourse to be understood and the purpose of the analysis. Aristotle (1991) was an early scholar of argumentation and rhetoric. Hayward Alker (1996), building on Aristotle and others, offers examples of how to model narratives, arguments and fairy tales. Karen Litfin shows how scientific discourses “do not solve environmental problems — they merely offer alternative interpretive lenses through which problems can be viewed, lenses that lend themselves to certain policy solutions” (1994, 194). Roxanne Doty (1996) examines how “representations” structure relations between North and South. Karin Fierke (1998) uses Wittgenstein to analyze the language games of international politics and in particular how discourse by non-state actors can change relations of power among states. Space does not allow discussion of other approaches taken for example by Hopf (2002), Weldes (2003), and the authors in Weldes, et al (1999). For a recent survey of critical discourse analysis and its techniques see Wodak and Meyer (2001). And as Laffey and Weldes argue in this issue, discourse analysis need not be restricted to the analysis of written texts.

### Argument Analysis

Meanings are constructed over time within and across cultures and so also are political arguments made and political issues decided over some duration. Thus, anyone seeking to understand how certain interpretations of the world became dominant, how other views were submerged or erased, and how new meanings took hold must examine some slice of the discourse prior to and co-terminus with the question they are interested in. In other words, the analyst must make choices about the kind of discourse they will focus on and the boundaries of the discourse — both temporal and genre — that they will examine.

If one is interested, for example, in how particular nuclear arms control questions were understood by participants one might engage in argument analysis of a discrete debate or formal argument. For example, Homer-Dixon and Karapin (1989) use graphical argument analysis to articulate and expose the “warrants” and data for claims by interlocutors during the “window of vulnerability” debate. Their method is suitable for explicating the architecture, if not the deeper meaning, of the logic of claims and how attacks might affect the strength of an argument. Alternatively, Duffy, Federking and Tucker used “dialogical analysis” to understand US-Soviet arms control negotiations which they test by showing that “certain

‘action theorems’ follow logically from the contents of belief inventories. (1998: 272)”

But sometimes the arguments of interest are not fully captured by formal and discrete debates among a small set of interlocutors. For example, in my recent work, I asked why slavery and colonialism ended when those practices were, arguably, still profitable. In other words, the realist and materialist explanations for the change in these longstanding practices were inapplicable. Why did the dominant beliefs about these practices change? While there were certainly discrete debates — such as the disputation between Bartolome de las Casas and Juan Gines Sepulveda in 1550 — the arguments about these practices occurred over five centuries, and involved many actors. I therefore needed to find a way to assess not only the logic or pragmatics of discrete debates, but to understand the content of informal ethical and practical arguments and to evaluate their causal importance. To do so, I developed a method of informal argument analysis to understand the underlying beliefs, political purchase, and persuasiveness of informal political arguments about slavery and colonialism that occurred over a several hundred year period.

The method of argument analysis of informal ethical arguments, as I developed it, occurs in five steps. First, having identified a problem or issue area, analysts seek to identify the purpose of particular arguments that are being used in efforts to maintain or challenge a practice. Analysts must then specify the argument’s role. Whether arguments are intended to facilitate deliberation, reframe the issues, persuade others, or do all of these things, may be inferred from what the speaker says and by the location (forum) where the arguments are made. In the transition from established behavioral norms to new norms, there are likely to be periods of confusion and uncertainty. With two or more conflicting (and perhaps nearly equally legitimate) prescriptive normative beliefs on the table, expectations will be uncertain, coordination will be more difficult, and the sense of approval or disapproval associated with certain practices may be in flux. It is at these points when ethical arguments may be the most prolific and explicit, as interlocutors strive to be clear and persuasive in their attempts to maintain an existing practice or establish a new mode of behavior.

Second, one must identify the specific beliefs that are held by dominant actors and that are at work in a particular political context. As Jonson and Toulmin note, “Each discipline has its special field of debate, within which people of experience share *koinoi topoi* (‘commonplaces’) — that is, bodies of experience that underlie the forms of argument that guide deliberation and discussion in the particular field. (1988: 74)” The goal is to find the *topoi* (starting point) of the arguments actors used to uphold or change practices and the background of pre-existing beliefs that interlocutors presupposed in making their arguments.

Third, informal argument analysis, as distinct from the analysis of discrete debates, expands the time horizon and asks where immediate and background beliefs came from and why and how they changed. Analysis of political arguments must thus be context sensitive, looking for the deeper beliefs

that are the starting points and background assumptions without which the arguments would be unintelligible. This entails tracing the process and examining the content of decisionmaking over long periods of time within particular historical and cultural contexts. The focus is on the articulation, content, contestation, and flow of arguments.

Fourth, informal argument analysis may attempt to show how and why some beliefs and arguments won out over others and ultimately why certain policies were chosen. In practice this means tracing whether and how the ethical arguments put forward succeeded in changing the terms of debate and whether an ethical argument meant to overturn a practice was able to denormalize, delegitimize, change actors' conceptions of possibility and their interests, alter the balance of political power, and have its normative beliefs institutionalized. This also entails looking at the grounds for change in the support for conformity and receptivity to new arguments. Informal analysis of ethical arguments thus emphasizes the content and process of arguments — the words used (and not used), appeals actors make to dominant (unquestioned) beliefs and other normative beliefs, claims about legitimacy, and the use of evidence. This method focuses on how the arguments develop over long periods of time, in particular social settings, including definition and redefinition of the problem (meta-arguments or framing), and the evolution of the features in the argument that are taken for granted or contested.

Fifth, the results of informal argument analysis ought to be compared with other plausible explanations for behaviors to see whether the arguments are important causally. There are several "tests" for the causal significance of ethical argument. 1) temporal ordering — normative beliefs and ethical arguments should be given as a justification for the behavior before or simultaneous to a behavior change, not after; 2) after an ethical argument succeeds, one would expect a (not necessarily universal) congruence between the normative beliefs that underpinned the ethical arguments and the behavior; 3) the relevant normative beliefs should be used in arguments about correct behavior and those who use those arguments are not ignored or mocked; 4) when the prescriptions for behavior implied by the ethical argument are not adhered to, those who do not adhere to the standards of normative belief attempt to justify their (non-normal) behavior on ethical or practical grounds (these actors thus acknowledge that they are norm violators and make an argument about why their violation was good or necessary); 5) the normative belief is linked with other normative beliefs, becoming part of the arguments used to advance these other norms. For example, anti-slavery, human rights, and self-determination beliefs should be discussed with each norm's reasoning being used to legitimize the other norms.<sup>1</sup> The new norms become part of what is seen to be a web of interrelated discourse.

Two harder tests of the role of normative belief and ethical argument are: 6) the presence and use of international sanctions by the majority of the international community to change the behavior of those who violate the normative pre-

scriptions or those who support such norm violators. Finally, 7) ethical arguments may be viewed as causally important whether and to the extent that actors with incentives to violate normative prescriptions act counter to their "interests" and follow the new normative prescriptions, or to the extent that actors re-frame their interests in light of coming to hold new normative beliefs. For the last test to be valid three conditions should hold: states (or rather the influential elites that shape government policies) and other actors should "know" their interests (or at least believe they do); actors should not have been compelled by other (non-normative) circumstances, such as a change in their ability to pursue their interests; and some more efficient solution for achieving the same ends, while not technically violating the normative prescriptions that followed from ethical arguments, was not found. This "interest" test should not be seen as creating a dichotomy between the normative and the self-interested behavior or actors. Ethical arguments may be used to change actors conceptions of their interests, and successful ethical arguments may alter the political situation to the point where it changes the material capabilities of actors. Rather, this test focuses our attention on the crucial relation between the ideational and material.

### **Challenges of Discourse and Argument Analysis**

No matter what method of discourse analysis one chooses, there are numerous challenges to doing discourse analysis. The first challenge, and perhaps the most daunting encountered by any scholar, is identifying the bounds of relevant discourse. As Roxanne Doty notes, "discourse delineates the terms of intelligibility whereby a particular 'reality' can be known and acted upon. When we speak of a discourse we may be referring to a particular group of texts, but also importantly to the social practices to which those texts are inextricably linked. . . . a discourse is inherently open ended and incomplete. . . . Any fixing of a discourse and the identities that are constructed by it, then, can only ever be of a partial nature. (1996: 6)" Thus, discourse analysis involves making hard choices of the extent and limits of analysis. Which leads to the next set of problems, those of interpretation and reliability, which are dealt with differently by the various approaches noted above. In other words, our analysis may not only be so large as to be unwieldy and overwhelming, but it is also necessarily partial and subject to dispute by others. There is not space here to discuss the various ways scholars who employ discourse analysis tackle these challenges. Suffice it to say however, that nearly all the scholars I have mentioned have given explicit attention to these questions.

There are two other elements of discourse analysis which there is also insufficient space to discuss here. Scholars who engage in discourse analysis must have a thorough understanding of the context of the discourse they are analyzing — modes of production, class structure, political formations — in order to situate their analysis and explain relationships. And those who engage in discourse analysis should be empathetic. Specifically, while an unreflective belief in the

discourse one is analyzing is actually unhelpful, a certain degree of empathy — the cognitive and emotional apprehension the world from another perspective — can sharpen the analysis. Indeed, a well developed sense of empathy would probably be a useful asset for many forms of both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

### Endnotes

\* I thank Melani Cammett and Karin Fierke for comments on an earlier draft. I also thank the editors of this exchange for their comments.

<sup>1</sup> Even if normative beliefs and ethical arguments pass all of these “tests,” we still cannot *prove* causality. However, passing all or several of these tests make it more *likely* that normative belief and ethical argument had a causal role.

### References

- Alker, Hayward R. 1996. *Rediscoveries and Reformulations: Humanistic Methodologies for International Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Aristotle. 1991. *The Art of Rhetoric*, translated with an introduction by H.C. Lawson-Tancred. New York: Penguin Books.
- Crawford, Neta. 2002. *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Doty, Roxanne. 1996. *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Duffy, Gavan, Federking, Brian K. and Tucker, Seth A. 1998. “Language Games: Dialogical Analysis of INF Negotiations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 42(2): 271-293.
- Fierke, Karin. 1998. *Changing Games, Changing Strategies: Critical Investigations in Security*. Manchester, UK.: Manchester University Press.
- Homer-Dixon, Thomas F. and Karapin, Roger S. 1989. “Graphical Argument Analysis: A New Approach to Understanding Arguments Applied to a Debate about the Window of Vulnerability,” *International Studies Quarterly* 33(4): 389-410.
- Hopf, Ted. 2002. *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Jonson, Albert R. and Toulmin, Stephen. 1988. *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Litfin, Karen. 1994. *Ozone Discourses: Science and Politics in Global Environmental Cooperation*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schulze, Hagan. 1998. *Germany: A New History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Weldes, Jutta, Laffey, Mark, Gusterson, Hugh, and Duvall, Raymond. 1999. *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities and the Production of Danger*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Weldes, Jutta. ed. 2003. *To Seek Out New Worlds: Exploring Links*

*between Science Fictino and World Politics*. New York: Palgrave.

Wodak, Ruth, and Meyer, Michael. eds. 2001. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage Publications.

---

## Content Analysis and its Place in the (Methodological) Scheme of Things

Will Lowe

Harvard University  
wlowe@latte.harvard.edu

In this article I’m going to argue two points. First, content analysis should not be seen as fundamentally different to any other type of quantitative method available to political scientists. And second, that political methodologists need to integrate content analysis into their current statistical machinery.

The first point is descriptive, and I’ll defend it by drawing some detailed analogies between existing methods, e.g. cross-tabs and regression, and seemingly unrelated content analytic techniques. At the high level, this will involve sketching out a probabilistic framework for understanding content analysis in general. More specifically, I’ll try to show that content analytic techniques often make most sense if they are understood as implementations of particular statistical models. These models and their assumptions are seldom made explicit, so uncovering them will have three desirable effects. First, and most obviously, knowing what assumptions your methods presume allows you to recognize when applying them is likely to be appropriate. Concretely, this helps answer the question: “should I use content analysis for this?” Second, a good understanding of assumptions makes it easier to relax or change them individually, in response to substantive needs. Finally, since the assumptions are explicitly probabilistic in nature, the methods can be integrated into standard statistical theory.

Philosophically, the purpose of constructing a probability model for existing content analytic practice is not description but explication. Content analysts may seldom work with a probability model in mind when doing research, but reconstructing a model is a way of explaining why, and under what conditions what analysts do makes sense.

### A class of probability models for content analysis

Arguably, the methodologist’s standard statistical tool is the linear regression model. At the most basic level, a regression relates some observable phenomena, the x-s, to other observable phenomena, the y-s, and assumes that x-s are measured without error, and that conditional on x values, y-s are randomly distributed around a mean value deterministically related to x. This is not a framework immediately well-suited to understanding content analysis, since although words and phrases are observed, their *content* is only inferred. For a more useful model approach we must look to psychology, to the classical literature on intelligence and individual differences that developed factor analysis. Content analyses, by



which I mean the standard dictionary-based methods embodied in e.g. Diction (Hart 1997) or VBPro (Miller, 1997) are best understood as *latent variable models* (Everitt, 1984), of which factor analysis is one instance.<sup>1</sup> Structural equation modeling (e.g. LISREL) and Bayesian networks (Pearl 2000) are two more powerful examples.

In the simplest form of latent variable model *unobserved* variables, which we can still usefully call  $x$ , give rise to observable effects, the  $y$ -s, which are randomly distributed around a mean value deterministically related to  $x$ . In other words, this is a regression where  $x$  is not observed. As in ordinary regression analysis we focus on the conditional distribution (or likelihood function)  $p(y|x)$ . *Inference* in a latent variable model involves inverting this distribution to obtain a probability distribution  $p(x|y)$  over values of  $x$  when a particular  $y$  is observed.

To begin the analogy,  $x$  describes the content of document, and  $y$  measures its observable features e.g. its words and phrases and how often they occur. Content analysis specifies the mapping from  $x$ -s to  $y$ -s by building a dictionary of words and phrases. The dictionary states how a particular underlying concept or content is expressed in words and phrases. It is a mapping from particular content to observables. We then infer the content of a new document by inverting this mapping to get its probable content.

The conditional distribution  $p(y|x)$  describes how a determinate but unobserved concept or content  $x$  gives rise to different (random) choices of words and phrases.<sup>2</sup>

In classical latent variable models,  $x$  is inferred by assigning it a prior distribution  $p(x)$ , and using Bayes theorem to find  $p(x|y)$ :

$$p(x|y) = p(y|x)p(x)/p(y)$$

Psychologists can often make strong assumptions about  $x$ , e.g. many psychological abilities are Normally distributed in the population. In content analysis this is not usually possible, so  $p(x)$  may be taken to be flat. In this case  $p(x|y)$  is proportional to  $p(y|x)$ .

### Probability models and assumptions

To take a concrete example: Pennebaker's Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) content dictionary<sup>3</sup> (Pennebaker and King, 1999) has an entry for the concept *insight*, containing the following list of words:

accept, acknowledge, adjust, admit ...

If there are  $K$  of these words, and we assume for simplicity that *insight* is the only content category in the dictionary, then one explicit probability model might look like this:

$p(y | x=\textit{insight})$  is a Multinomial distribution with probability values of  $1/K$  for each of the words in the list, and 0 for every other word.

Since all conditional distributions express a recipe for generating data, in regression as well as latent variable models, we can think of the Multinomial  $p(y|x)$  in the same way: Whenever the author wants to express *insight*, she picks a

word from this list randomly and inserts it into the text. And if there are several categories, then the recipe for generating a whole text is:

- 1) pick a content category,
- 2) pick a word in that list at random,
- 3) write down the word,
- 4) go to 1.

These text generation assumptions listed above are seldom stated as such, perhaps because they are quite implausible when revealed to the light, but the success of content analytic methods are a credit to their practical applicability.

The relevant assumptions here are then:

- *conditional independence*: word choice is conditionally independent given the content category. This is the random generation part.
- *irrelevance of syntax*: all non-content related factors that structure a text are noise,
- *equal category probability*: each category is as likely as any other.

### Working the analogy

Returning to the single category case, the quantity  $p(y | x=\textit{insight})$  can be used to rank any new document according to how much of the LIWC concept *\_insight\_* is expressed in it using Bayes theorem.<sup>4</sup> This model is an explication because  $p(y | x=\textit{insight})$  will rank any new documents (with words  $y$ ) in the same order as simply counting up the number of times each word in the LIWC entry occurs.<sup>5</sup> It is in this sense that it is useful to think of this as the implicit probability model underlying content analysis: *If* the generating mechanism for text is as described above and the assumptions are fulfilled, *then* constructing dictionaries as lists and counting occurrences in documents will be the best way to infer content.

With assumptions in view then, we can begin to change them. Some immediate changes would be: to change the *equal category probability* assumption on the basis of data. We expect different genres to have different probabilities of expressing categories in same dictionary. And we expect that not all *insight* terms have an equal chance of occurring in a document e.g. because authors avoid repetition or because some terms are more formal or forceful than others. Finally, content is certainly not the only force determining how words occur, so we might model the others e.g. by adding grammatical constraints, or introducing serial dependencies, perhaps using  $n$ -gram models borrowed from computational linguistics. It might also be useful to think of content analysis categories in the same way as linguists think of parts of speech - as the unobserved variable that determines whether 'bank' is a something a river has, or something a plane does - and use a Hidden Markov Model (Rabiner, 1989) tagger to assign content in a way that relaxes the conditional independence assumption.

All these suggestions take the content model beyond anything that would be effectively implemented with a list of categories and word lists. But that is exactly the point. Knowing the assumptions we have been making allows us to ad-



vance beyond them, and reconstructing them probabilistically allows us to leverage existing statistical methods.

Model specifics aside, reconstructing content analysis in a probabilistic framework provides another useful opportunity. Any probabilistic content analysis model implicitly defines a discourse, in the sense that such a model is a theory of what is more or less likely to be said, and of what the conceptual elements are that generate and constrain these possibilities. There is certainly more to discourse than simple conditions of lexical possibility, but the non-verbal structures that discourse and content analysts use words to investigate cannot completely float free of their texts and leave language choice unconstrained.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, texts might therefore be usefully compared under several models, and questions like “has this discourse fundamentally changed?” addressed as “is this new text probable under my old model, or is it better thought of as generated by this new one?” These new questions will be recognizable to political methodologists as the familiar and well-studied problems of model selection.

### Integrating content analysis

If content analysis really can be understood as a implicit form of statistical inference, then there is no reason not to bring it into the existing methodological fold. Aside from making good scientific sense, there are sociological advantages to doing so. Content analysis has rather negative associations in some political methodology circles, but “methods are not epistemologies” (Wendt, 1999), and there is nothing about content analytic methodology that decides epistemological position. Thus although this article has attempted an explication that emphasizes consistency with positivist inference standards, another explication might reconstruct content analytic practice as quite a different exercise. But that is the nature, and utility of explication.

If the broadly positivist path described above is pursued, then one way to demonstrate the continuity of content analysis with the familiar toolbox of statistical methods is simply to go ahead and integrate the two, so proving it can be done. This article is a first sketch of how we might start. The advantage of integration to more traditional methodology is a much needed broadening of outlook, and crucially, a set of ways to deal systematically with text. The advantages to content analysts are ready access to highly articulated theory and long collective experience of data analysis in many forms. The advantages to both sides seem too great to turn down.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Two excellent sources of information on contemporary content analysis methods, available software, and approaches are <http://www.car.ua.edu> and <http://www.content-analysis.de>.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Random’ here is used in its statistical sense to denote anything unrelated to the mechanism being characterized. In an information extraction task, ‘who did what to whom’ would be  $x$  and the noise in  $y$  would cover stylistic variations, whereas in a rhetorical study of the same text, the style itself would be  $x$ , and ‘who did what to whom’ merely noise. In both cases,

necessary grammatical structure would be noise, since one cannot simply throw down words in any order to communicate content.

<sup>3</sup> A content dictionary in this context means a mapping a set of words or phrases to one word; the one word is the label of a substantive category and the set describes the words or phrases that indicate the tokening of the category in text. As an example, for the substantive category, *death* (category 59), the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) dictionary maps the word set {ashes, burial\*, buried, bury, casket\*, cemet\*, coffin\*, cremat\*, dead death\*, decay\*, decease\*, deteriorat\*, die, died, dies, drown\*, dying, fatal, funeral\*, grave\*, grief, griev\*, kill\*, mortal\*, mourn\*, murder\* suicid\*,terminat\*} to LIWC category 59. The asterisks are “wild-card” characters telling the program to treat “cremating,” “cremated” and “cremate,” as all matching cremat\*, and thus all mapping to category 59. For the substantive category, *insight* (category #22), LIWC lists 117 terms in the word set.

<sup>4</sup> And if there is more than one content category it can for each word provide an estimate of the probability that any particular word expresses each of the available categories. This is explicitly built into Benoit, Laver and Garry’s (2003) work on Wordscores.

<sup>5</sup> Actually it will do better since it will correct for the document length.

<sup>6</sup> To assume that they can is a form of Cartesian skepticism that is as immune to reassurance as it is to empirical argument.

### References

- B. S. Everitt (1984) *An Introduction to Latent Variable Models* Chapman and Hall, London.
- R. P. Hart (1997) *DICTION 4.0: The Text-Analysis Program* Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA
- M. Laver, K. Benoit, and J. Garry, (2003) Extracting policy positions from political text using words as data. *American Political Science Review* 97(2)
- M. Miller (1997) Frame mapping and analysis of news coverage of contentious issues, *The Social Science Computer Review* 14(4)
- J. Pearl (2000) *Causality* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK
- J. W. Pennebaker and L. A. King (1999). Linguistic styles: Language use as an individual difference. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77
- L. R. Rabiner (1989). A tutorial on hidden Markov models and selected applications in speech recognition. *Proceedings of IEEE*, 77 (2)
- A. Wendt (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

---

## Methodological Reflections on Discourse Analysis

**Mark Laffey**

SOAS, University of London  
M123@soas.ac.uk

**Jutta Weldes**

University of Bristol  
Jutta.Weldes@bristol.ac.uk

Part of the difficulty in establishing methods for discourse analysis (DA) is that DA is not singular. Distinct forms of analysis are collected under this label, invoking different understandings of discourse, drawing on different disciplines and canons, and specifying different methodologies. DA is most commonly understood as referring to language. Analyses thus often deploy the term discourse to refer to 'extended samples of spoken dialogue' (Fairclough, 1992: 3) such as conversations and so prompt analysis of, among other things, turn taking or the structure of conversational openings and closings (e.g., Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Coulthard, 1992).

For us, discourse is not equivalent to language. Instead, we define discourse as structure and practices. As structure, discourses are 'socio-cultural resources used by people' – and which use them – 'in the construction of meaning about their world and their activities' (Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992: 192-3). As practice, they are structures of meaning-in-use. This conception of discourse implies that:

- Discourses are sets of rules that both enable practices and are reproduced and/or transformed by them. In examining a discourse, we examine 'a group of rules' that 'define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects' (Foucault, 1972: 49).
- Discourses manifest themselves in both linguistic and non-linguistic practices (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987: 82-4). The study of discourse therefore cannot be limited to the study of texts or language narrowly defined (Neumann, 2002).
- Discourses are productive. They produce subjects, objects, and the relations among them. They produce truth as well, stipulating the criteria according to which claims are judged. DA thus highlights the mutual implication of power and knowledge.
- Discourses are always implicated in institutions, broadly conceived. They circulate through and around – sometimes reinforcing, sometimes challenging, sometimes participating in or being expressed through, sometimes completely ignored or marginalised by – sites of institutionalised power.
- Discourses are inherently political. They are about the production and distribution of power, and struggles

over knowledge, interests, identity and the social relations they enable or undermine.

### Method

As Milliken observes, there is disagreement amongst discourse analysts over whether to do 'methods' at all (1999: 226-7). Like her, we do not believe that attention to method and rigor necessarily entails the sort of 'scientism' against which many discourse analysts define themselves. In methodological terms, we understand DA to entail the retroduction of a discourse through the empirical analysis of its realization in practices (Laffey and Weldes, 1997: 210).<sup>1</sup> That is, DA reasons backward to establish structure from its empirical manifestations. It asks what the conditions of possibility are of this or that particular discursive production. At the same time, it also examines how discourses are naturalised in such a way as to become common sense, the 'regime of the "taken-for-granted"' (Hall, 1985: 105). 'Method' in this context thus refers to the conceptual apparatus and empirical procedures used to make possible this retroduction.<sup>2</sup>

Two concepts that help us to get at these related aspects of discourse are articulation and interpellation.<sup>3</sup> Articulation itself has two dimensions. First, it refers to the practice of creating and temporarily fixing meaning through the contingent connection of signifying elements, whether narrowly linguistic or broadly semiotic. Through articulation, different terms, symbols and meanings come to connote one another and thereby to be welded into associative chains (Hall, 1985: 104). Second, articulation refers to the connection of these meanings to institutions and social relations. The notion of articulation implies that these connections are socially constructed, historically contingent, and therefore require a great deal of ideological labor to establish and maintain. At the same time, it means that articulations can be broken, making rearticulation an ever-present – if more or less difficult – possibility.

Interpellation refers to a dual process whereby subject-positions are created and concrete individuals are 'hailed' into or interpellated by them (Althusser, 1971: 174). That is, interpellation means, first, that specific identities are created when social relations are depicted. Different representations of the world entail different identities – they make sense from or presuppose a certain interpretive position – which in turn carry with them different ways of functioning in the world, are located within different power relations, and make possible different interests. Second, in a successful interpellation concrete individuals come to identify with these subject-positions. Once they identify with them, the representations in which they appear make sense and the power relations and interests entailed in them are naturalized. An important condition of such naturalization is the practical adequacy of representations to the social realities people face. As a result, the representations appear to be common sense, to reflect 'the way the world really is.'

How then, armed with these concepts, does DA proceed empirically?<sup>4</sup> Articulation can be investigated through a series of analytical steps. These might entail, first, investigat-

ing representational practices. The main signifying elements of the discourse, whether linguistic or non-linguistic, must be identified. Early neoliberal discourses like Thatcherism, for example, were constructed out of discursive elements such as 'free markets', 'big government', and the like (Hall, 1988: 39; Peck and Tickell, 2002). Chains of connotation among these signifying elements might include the linking of 'unemployment' to 'welfare state' to 'big government' and in turn to 'de-regulation' and 'privatization' in order to make markets 'free' and 'flexible', for example, or the linking of patriarchal notions of the 'solid English citizen' to 'free markets' through 'working-class respectability' (Hall, 1988: 50). Within such chains it is usually possible to identify nodes where several different connotative chains come together (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Signs are always multi-accentual, in the sense that different social interests can be refracted through particular signs – such as 'freedom' or 'democracy' or 'respectability' for instance – in different ways, with diverse ideological effects (Purvis and Hunt, 1993). It is for this reason that such nodes themselves become sites of struggle, as overlapping and competing discourses seek authoritatively to define what is real, true or possible.

Further analysis requires discovering the articulations of these representations with, and their sedimentations in, institutions. Some discourses are more powerful than others because they are articulated to, and partake of, institutional power. Thatcherism, for instance, was first articulated to think tanks like the neo-liberal Institute for Economic Affairs and the Centre for Policy Studies, then to the Conservative party, and gradually to media outlets like *The Sun* and *The Mail* (Hall, 1988: 46-7). Investigating articulations also involves examining power/knowledge relations as these are the mechanisms that obscure or naturalize relations of power. The 'ideological effects of representations are not internal to the representations themselves but are closely bound up with the contexts in which they are deployed' (Laffey and Weldes, 1997: 211). DA thus necessarily entails considering not only representational practices but also social relations. This involves examining, for instance, the normalizing effects of Thatcher's splendidly ideological claim that 'there is no alternative' to the free market, despite the existence of alternatives, and the curious fact that the size and penetration of the state into society has actually increased under neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore, 2002).

Interpellation, also, is investigated through a series of analytical steps. Crucial is the discovery of the subject positions – identities of subjects and objects and their position relative to others (e.g., Doty, 1993: 306) – constructed in the discourse. U.S. cold war discourse, for instance, constituted 'the U.S.' in opposition to 'the Soviet Union'. The analysis of predication – the linking of qualities, literally predicates, to subjects and objects – tells us what meanings attach to them. Predicates attached to the U.S. thus included freedom, honesty and openness, democracy and defensive strength. The Soviet Union, in contrast, was a slave state, duplicitous and secretive, despotic and aggressive. The oppositional subject positions, that is, followed from the predication.

A crucial question in the investigation of interpellation is 'who speaks', that is, which subject position authors the discourse? A good example here is the striking 'we' of U.S. political discourse (Weldes, 1999: 105-107). This 'we' is a 'shifty shifter' (Schwichtenberg, 1984: 305) that facilitates interpellation: it is a referentially ambiguous pronoun that allows authorship to slip between and among 'we, U.S. decision makers,' 'we, the U.S. state,' and 'we, the U.S. public.' Identifying a shifty shifter exposes a mechanism that helps to construct a subject position – 'we, the U.S.' – while simultaneously welding disparate audiences into a single identity, creating common sense by hailing concrete individuals into that identity, and legitimating the argument in which the identity participates. 'Of course, "we, the U.S." – freedom loving democrats – must combat totalitarianism wherever "we" find it.' In turn, not only must such a subject position make sense, i.e., be meaningful, it must also make it possible to negotiate the world. Interpellation thus gets at the question of practical adequacy. It is this 'making sense' of interpellation – in both senses – that generates common sense – the moment of ideological closure, of normalization and naturalization, when those hailed by the discourse say 'yes, of course.'

Examining processes of interpellation and the question 'who speaks?', also highlights other power relations. 'Power/knowledge' practices (Foucault, 1980) privilege some actors and voices while marginalizing others. One can investigate which subjects are privileged over others, for example, and how this manifests itself in both linguistic and non-linguistic practices. As Schram shows in his analysis of welfare discourse, 'top-down managerial discourse constructs poverty and welfare statistics in ways that emphasize the state's managerial concerns at the expense of the concerns of the poor' (1995: 77). The result is a neoliberal shift from welfare as the solution to poverty to welfare dependency as itself the problem. In the process, the issue of poverty is attributed to a marginal group – and thus itself marginalised – rather than being seen as a persistent structural feature of capitalist societies.

### **Power and Politics**

DA is always about power and politics because it examines the conditions of possibility for practices, linguistic and otherwise. As such, it exposes the ideological labour that goes into producing meaning and the ideological effects of particular structures of meaning-in-use. The discursive structures that make meaning possible are the 'stakes, par excellence, of political struggle, the inextricably theoretical and practical struggle for power to preserve or transform the social world by preserving or transforming the categories by which it is perceived' and enacted (Bourdieu, 1985: 729). Because discursive practices entail power relations, they become sites of contestation and struggle.

None of this is accessible through content analysis (CA). The emphasis in CA on patterns in documents, on identifying content units (words, themes, stories and the like) and their clustering, does offer a preliminary way of accessing processes akin to articulation. There is also a superficial similarity be-



tween the CA emphasis on messages and our focus on interpellation. But these similarities disappear once we discard the mistaken assumption that DA and CA both examine 'language' (cf. Neuendorf, this issue). The emphasis in DA is discursive practices and the structures – linguistic and non-linguistic – that enable them. At stake is the discursive structures that make certain kinds of representations and practices possible and – for many – plausible, not the mere frequency of particular words or their patterns in the representations themselves. To repeat, DA is about power and politics, not language. The one is not reducible to the other.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The limits of a discourse are those boundaries 'when particular representations of the world seem "unintelligible," "irrational," "meaningless," or "ungraspable" in and through the symbolic resources offered by' the discourse itself (Muppidi, 1999: 124-5).

<sup>2</sup> There are divergent methods even for investigating discourse defined as structures of meaning-in-use, including computational modelling (e.g., Hudson, 1991), predicate analysis (e.g., Milliken, 2001), metaphorical analysis (e.g., Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) or the approach we discuss here. They can be used in combination.

<sup>3</sup> For more detail see Althusser, 1971; Laclau, 1979; Hall, 1985; Weldes, 1996, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> In our view, DA methods are replicable and subject to intersubjective checking (see also Crawford, Fierke, and Hopf, this issue).

### References

- Althusser, Louis. 1971. 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses,' in his *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, pp. 127-186.
- Atkinson, J. Maxwell, and Paul Drew. 1979. *Order in Court: The Organization of Verbal Interaction in Judicial Settings*, London: Macmillan.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1985. 'Social space and the genesis of groups,' *Theory and Society*, 14(6): 723-744.
- Brenner, Neil, and Nik Theodore, eds. 2002. *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Coulthard, Malcolm, ed. 1992. *Advances in Spoken Discourse Analysis*, London, New York: Routledge.
- Doty, Roxanne. 1993. 'Foreign policy as social construction: A post-positivist analysis of US counterinsurgency policy in the Philippines,' *International Studies Quarterly*, 37(3): 297-320.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1992. *Discourse and Social Change*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, New York: Pantheon Books.
- Hall, Stuart. 1985. 'Signification, representation, ideology: Althusser and the post-structuralist debates,' *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 2(2): 91-114.
- Hall, Stuart. 1988. 'The toad in the garden: Thatcherism among the theorists,' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 35-73.
- Hudson, Valerie M., ed. 1991. *Artificial Intelligence and International Politics*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Laclau, Ernesto. 1979. *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, London: Verso.
- Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London: Verso.
- Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. 1987. 'Post-Marxism without apologies,' *New Left Review*, 166: 79-106.
- Laffey, Mark, and Jutta Weldes. 1997. 'Beyond belief: Ideas and symbolic technologies in the study of international relations,' *European Journal of International Relations*, 3(2): 193-237.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Milliken, Jennifer. 1999. 'The study of discourse in international relations: A critique of research and methods,' *European Journal of International Relations*, 5(2): 225-254.
- Milliken, Jennifer. 2001. *The Social Construction of the Korean War: Conflict and Its Possibilities*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Muppidi, Himadeep. 1999. 'Postcoloniality and the production of insecurity: The persistent puzzle of U.S.-Indian relations,' in Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson, and Raymond Duvall, eds., *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 119-146.
- Neumann, Iver. 2002. 'Returning practice to the linguistic turn: The case of diplomacy,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 31(3): 627-651.
- Ó Tauthail, Gearóid, and John Agnew. 1992. 'Geopolitics and discourse: Practical geopolitical reasoning in American foreign policy,' *Political Geography*, 11(2): 190-204.
- Peck, Jamie, and Adam Tickell. 2002. 'Neoliberalizing space,' in Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, eds. 2002. *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 33-57.
- Purvis, Trevor, and Alan Hunt. 1993. 'Discourse, ideology, discourse, ideology, discourse, ideology...', *British Journal of Sociology* 44(3): 473-499.
- Schram, Sanford. 1995. *Words of Welfare: The Poverty of Social Science and the Social Science of Poverty*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Schwichtenberg, Cathy. 1984. 'The Love Boat: The packaging and selling of love, heterosexual romance, and family,' *Media, Culture & Society*, 6: 301-311.
- Weldes, Jutta. 1996. 'Constructing national interests,' *European Journal of International Relations*, 2(3): 275-318.
- Weldes, Jutta. 1999. *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Minneapolis: University



---

## *Discourse and Content Analysis: Some Fundamental Incompatibilities*

**Ted Hopf**

Ohio State University  
hopf.2@osu.edu

Let me begin with a caveat. My version of discourse analysis that unfolds below is as much a normative ideal in my own mind, as much as a description of how it actually is or has been done in practice, although I find the Hardy, Harley and Phillips's (HHP) definition a very comfortable fit. Therefore, it may come off like "already existing socialism" came off to residents of the late Soviet Union. Moreover, my understanding of what content analysis is and does is doubtlessly biased in the opposite direction, some vague memories of graduate school reading assignments that purported to be using that method supplemented by the contributions to this symposium. I apologize for both biases, but hope you will not stopreading just yet! What follows is an enumeration of those aspects of DA that I find fundamentally incompatible with CA, conventionally understood. (Though HHP's surfacing of a more qualitative CA softens some of these differences considerably) But then, perhaps surprisingly, I claim that DA is in fact much more "scientific" than either practitioners of DA or CA acknowledge.

Seven important differences:

- DA is a theory of power politics
- DA assumes an open social system
- DA assumes social, not natural, kinds
- DA places texts in intersubjective context
- DA treats anomalies and absences as evidence, too
- DA is about daily social practices, a social text, not just a written one
- DA assumes at least the partial autonomy of language

From the outset, it must be acknowledged that DA is in fact a political theory as much as a method of inquiry. As Crawford and HHP explicate here, DA assumes that language is a medium within which prevailing power relations are articulated. The use of discourse reproduces these predominant configurations of power, and disrupting and challenging them is one of the central features of what we call politics. This means that the meaning of any given text for DA often points to some underlying political problem or question. I do not think that the latter come up very often as topics of inquiry in CA.

DA recognizes that discourses reside in open social systems. (Ricoeur 1984, 135) To put it another way, it is impossible to control for "omitted variable bias." (King, Keohane, Verba 1994, 172) The meaning of any conversation or family outing is not fixed; it depends on the contexts in which a par-

ticular text is being performed. Not only is meaning dependent on the particular text in which a practice is located, but also on the relationship of that text to others. DA therefore assumes intertextuality, the relationship among texts. (Greenblatt 1990) And since it is impossible ever to specify with certainty where the texts stop, so to speak, it is an open social system, and statements about meaning must therefore be moderated accordingly. Neuendorf appropriately warns against "drawing generalized conclusions about one's qualitative findings." (Neuendorf 2004)

This lack of certainty about ultimate meaning is in part rooted in the assumption that the variables of interest are socially constructed in a particular intersubjective space, and so may not be present elsewhere, or at a different time. In other words, meanings and categorizations are social, not natural, kinds. They are products of human agency, not of God or Nature. So, these meanings stand mostly in relation to each other, rather than in relationship to an objective reality. Without the objectivist anchor, natural kinds are impossible, and so, generalizations with high levels of scientific certainty are, too. (Little 1991, 190-9)

Since meanings are bounded by context, DA does not expect a word like "market" to mean the same thing whenever and wherever it is uttered. Different meanings across different contexts is a hard reality for CA to assimilate into its "a priori coding instrumentation." (Neuendorf 2004) Instead statements and actions are always within a broader text that give them intersubjective meaning, and this single text itself is in meaning-giving and meaning-taking relationships with other texts. This necessary intertextuality implies not only that the meaning of a "variable" cannot just be assigned by a putatively objective observer, but also that this meaning cannot be assumed to be the same across time and place, KKV's "unit homogeneity" problem. (KKV 1994, 93-4)

DA does not pretend to solve the complex of problems here: open social systems, social kinds, omitted variable bias, and unit *heterogeneity*. Instead, it recognizes them as insuperable problems requiring not the application of yet more methodological techniques, but rather the admission that knowledge claims about social phenomena must simply be less ambitious. In other words, epistemology and ontology trump methodology. The result is strong claims, but within more bounded historical and temporal domains. For example, the context for Weldes's discursive analysis of the Cuban missile crisis is the Kennedy Administration in 1962; she does not make any claims about American foreign policy before or after that crisis. (Weldes 1999) Kier's account of French and British military doctrine before World War II relies on the discourses that predominated within the French and British military institutions in the 1930s. She does not make claims about militaries in the world in general, or even the French or British militaries after the war. (Kier 1997) DA recognizes its epistemological differences with CA, but does not try to overcome them, but instead bases more modest claims as a consequence of them.

DA also assumes that two kinds of phenomena matter that CA might not regard as so critical: absences and anoma-

lies. The assumption in DA is that if women never appear as engineers, race car drivers, presidents, or prime ministers, this is evidence of how daily lived reality is being socially constructed in a particular context. It is unclear to me how CA would theorize absent variables, given its emphasis on "a priori coding instrumentation." Second, and related, in a predominant discourse of women absent in high status and high paying careers, the anomalous presence of a woman bank robber, for example, would be highly interesting to DA. It would perhaps be treated as the possible emergence of a counter-hegemonic discourse on gender, and would prompt more attention to see if other kinds of "subversive" practices were present in the text. CA would perhaps more likely treat anomalies as noise, unexplained variance, or part of the error term.

DA is about more than words or written texts. It is also about the daily conduct in which each of us engages to make our way in the social world. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, Bourdieu 1990, and Geertz 1973) While DA much too often neglects this ethnographic part of the picture, concentrating far too much on the written and spoken word, CA seemingly ignores it altogether. When a white woman walking down the street shifts her handbag to the other side of her body upon spying an approaching pair of young black men, she is discursively constructing race relations in that context. She has said not a word, and there is no written record of the event. But that simple action produces as much meaning as a few choice words. But I confess that this pushes DA beyond where it usually goes, as well.

Finally, DA usually assumes at least the partial autonomy of language, such that actors are themselves, in part, constituted by the daily practices in which they participate. (Doty 1983) CA, on the other hand, takes the speakers as given. This is reminiscent of the old debate between neorealists and regime theorists about international institutions. Are the latter just product, or are they productive? Do we just use language to express our preferences, or does language itself help constitute those very preferences in the first place?

A recent example springs to mind. I observed to a colleague of mine how surprised I was that the speakers' series she directed was entitled Statesman's Forum. She laughed and assured me there were no women leaders from the part of the world for which she was responsible. In this innocuous exchange is revealed her liberal confidence that language merely reflects reality and my assumption that language is helping create reality.

Carol Cohn, while a postdoctoral scholar at Harvard, discovered the power of the predominant discourse on nuclear weapons, such that some of the very concepts she would have liked to introduce into the conversation, peace, for example, were selected against by the prevailing discourse of deterrence and warfighting. (Cohn 1987) Notice I use the phrase selected against, and not prevented. After all Cohn was not physically restrained from talking about peace, but rather if she wanted to be a participant in the conversation, a speaker who would have continued legitimacy, authority, and credibility, she could not talk about peace in a way meaningful

to her. She, instead, had to assimilate herself to the discourse of post-exchange ratios, hard target kill capabilities, circular error probabilities, drawdown curves, and the like. Here is discursive power at work; here is the partial autonomy of language at work. Here is an obstacle liberal communicative action theorists have to overcome to make their version of an idealized speech situation work. Here is a problem with CA. How would a content analyst code Cohn's use of words that she herself in fact has not autonomously chosen? One might suggest that the important theorizing here should be done about the discursive structure that is "causing" the language that has to be chosen to participate in the conversation, not the words themselves. I guess this is a bottom line of sorts: would CA have recovered what words mean during a conversation between Carol Cohn and her post-doc colleagues? I think my provisional answer is no, because finding the social or discursive structure that is already shaping the conversation is not part of the focus of CA, conventionally understood.

This discussion of the partial autonomy of language relates to the issue of DA as a kind of political theory, a theory of power politics. But it also points out the implicit political theory that undergirds CA: liberalism. For CA to work, the actors must be assumed to be sovereign autonomous independent individuals choosing precisely what they want to say, as if what they want to say is not a social product itself recoverable in discourse. Perfect intentionality, if you will, assumed by CA, is theorized by DA.

Having enumerated these seven bedrock differences between DA and CA, my methodological conclusion might be unexpected. But I argue that there is no reason for discourse analysts not to adhere to some common forms of research design and social science methodology. Hans-Georg Gadamer has written that the natural and human sciences are separated *not* "by a difference in method, but a difference in the aims of knowledge." (Gadamer 1987, 340) Look, for example, at Crawford's list of seven ways to determine whether her own interpretations of the discourse on slavery over 150 years are superior to candidate alternative explanations. All discourse analysts should act with such methodological self-consciousness, with an eye to both the replicability and competitive validity of their findings. The predominance of a discourse may very well be related to the underlying configuration of political and social power that is discovered through the discursive analysis. At that point an account of the determinants of that particular configuration could permit a set of "predictions" about future sustainability and change both possible, and falsifiable, in principle. Possible determinants could be derived from available theories of institutionalism, coalitional and electoral politics, and social and economic structure. The point is that discourse analysis need not be merely the "raw material appendage" of putatively more scientific approaches to the study of politics. It can hold its own as a generator of theory and testable hypotheses derived therefrom.

I think the problem with HHP's characterization of DA is that it is only concerned with change, rather than constancy. In fact, yes, in principle, meanings are always in flux, but this

does not mean that they are not fixed through power arrangements institutionalized in various ways at various historical junctures, such that it is possible to theorize about replicable patterns of social conduct over time. We need to weigh equally DA's political theory of language and subjectivity and its theory of discursive power embodied in normally constrained subjects.

I wonder as well about HHP's validity measures of DA and CA. I would have said that CA has behavioral implications: these beliefs imply these actions. And I would go on to try to get DA to make similar predictions based on its analysis of the politics and institutions of discursive reproduction in the domain of interest.

In sum, I think that DA can maintain its fundamental differences with CA while simultaneously being far more methodologically rigorous, and so participate far more vigorously and equally with putatively more scientific methods of analysis in fashioning accounts of the social world.

### References

- Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor, 1966)
- Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990)
- Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," *Signs* 12:4 (Summer 1987), 687-718.
- Neta Crawford, "Understanding Discourse: A Method of Ethical Argument Analysis," *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section on Qualitative Methods* 2:1 (Spring 2004).
- Roxanne Lynn Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of US Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines," *International Studies Quarterly* 37:3 (September 1993), 297-320.
- Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973)
- Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Foreword to the Second German Edition of Truth and Method," in eds. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy, *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987)
- Stanley Jay Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse* (New York: Routledge, 1990)
- Cynthia Hardy, Bill Harley, and Nelson Phillips, "Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis: Two Solitudes?" *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section on Qualitative Methods* 2:1 (Spring 2004).
- Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997)
- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994)
- Daniel Little, *Varieties of Social Explanation*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991)
- Kimberly A. Neuendorf, "Content Analysis: A Contrast and Complement to Discourse Analysis," *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section on Qualitative Methods* 2:1

(Spring 2004).

Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984)

Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999)

## Content Analysis-- A Contrast and Complement to Discourse Analysis

**Kimberly A. Neuendorf**

Cleveland State University

*k.neuendorf@sim.scsuohio.edu*

According to experts on discourse analysis, texts are not individually meaningful (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 4). This notion strikes at the heart of a primary commonality between discourse analysis (DA) and content analysis (CA). Both are concerned with drawing conclusions about some aspect of human communication from a carefully selected set of messages. How they do so is rather different, but ultimately their findings can fit together quite nicely, providing a good example of triangulation of methods, a highly desirable situation.

### Content Analysis

Content analysis is a summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method, including an observance of the standards of objectivity/inter-subjectivity<sup>1</sup>, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability (with probability sampling from a defined population of messages), replicability, and hypothesis testing (Neuendorf, 2002). It belongs to the "family" of quantitative methods to which survey research also belongs—indeed, some researchers hold that CA is in fact a subset of survey research (Neuendorf, 2002). Both surveys and CAs measure variables as they "naturally" occur (as opposed to the manipulation of independent variables in the true experiment); their sole difference is CA's focus on a message component as the unit of data collection or analysis. CA is not limited as to the type of message-centric variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented. Moreover, contrary to some popular misconceptions, CA is not limited to a mechanical counting of manifest characteristics. Such counting is indeed often the "bread and butter" of CA, but there's much more to the meal.

CA is often quite rich, and offers the possibility of tapping complex, latent constructs. Rogan and Hammer's (1995) study of authentic crisis negotiations is a great example of how deep meaning may be extracted via CA. In their study, "message affect" was measured via five adjuncts of language intensity derived from qualitative and experimental work—obscure words, general metaphors, profanity and sex, death statements, and expanded qualifiers.

Their sample was too small and non-random to achieve generalizability, but their findings were striking—the profiles for negotiator/perpetrator message affect were different for



negotiation processes with successful vs. unsuccessful outcomes. The analysis technique and findings might prove useful not only in a practical, predictive sense for negotiation practitioners, but also in providing a baseline for further analysis of deep meanings of negotiation profiles. The “markers” of significant shifts in the relational roles of negotiators and perpetrators located via CA might be used in further study by DA analysts. Thus, CA may provide identification of the “pragmatic” contextual cues of crisis communication, while DA provides a more nuanced interpretation of their meaning.

CA is not limited to an analysis of words. As far back as the seminal Paine Fund Studies on the content and effects of movies on American youth (Charters, 1933; Dale, 1935), the stylistics, images, and behaviors of characters in moving image content have been systematically analyzed via CA. Concern over the effects of violent television in the 1960s and 1970s brought renewed commitment to such CA studies, spurring the development of CA schemes to measure such nonverbals as anti-social, pro-social, gender-typed, family role, and occupational role behaviors (e.g., Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Greenberg, 1980). The analysis of written or transcribed spoken words, a subset of content analysis, is called text analysis. Its computer-aided form (now supported by more than 20 softwares) is called CATA (computer-aided text analysis), a fast-growing segment of the CA literature.

CA is limited to a focus on messages. A simple inference from such messages to source motivations or receiver effects is, some have argued, not warranted. But to take full advantage of its findings, CA may be linked with source and/or receiver data, providing core evidence for a full model of the communication process (in what has been called the “integrative model of content analysis”; Neuendorf, 2002). For example, Naccarato and Neuendorf (1998) analyzed a wide variety of textual and graphical characteristics of business-to-business print ads, and then statistically linked those characteristics with four measures of readership and recall for the ads, derived from a commercial magazine readership survey. And Hertog and Fan (1995) paired their CA of news stories about AIDS transmission in major newspapers and news magazines with findings from independent public opinion polls. They found news coverage to predict public opinion at a later point in time; public opinion did not predict subsequent news content. In both cases, the bigger picture of message effects was generated by a combining of systematic CAs and quantitative data from “external” studies. And, both examples show the potential of CA procedures—particularly when linked with other data sources—to discover particular patterns of control, both in terms of information flow and message impact on receivers. Such dynamics seem central to the fundamental concern of DA with power and hierarchy.

### **DA and CA Compared**

The range of substantive topics appropriate to DA is also generally appropriate to CA. Moreover, the various “sources of data” (types of messages/texts) can also serve as the foci of CA analyses. Both methodologies have embraced the use of computers for particular tasks, although in both

cases, their application generally seems to be a case of old wine in newer, faster bottles. In considering both DA and CA, there is a common bottom line—“There are no unmediated data” (Phillips & Hardy, p. 83). Those using DA attempt to fully disclose their mediation (through rich discussion of all “backgroundings”—assumptions, epistemologies, etc.), while those using CA attempt to minimize their mediation (through adherence to the scientific method, including an aim toward intersubjectivity, if not objectivity).

The overriding importance for DA of validity, and the relative lack of concern with reliability (Phillips & Hardy, pp. 79–80), is a core dissimilarity between the two methodologies. For CA, reliability is paramount—in fact, measures that do not achieve an acceptable level of reliability ought to be dropped from further analysis. Further, replicability is clearly not a focus of DA, while it remains an additional important standard for CA.

Thus, in CA, measurement is via a coding scheme that is written out in great detail, with an accompanying coding form (or a set of dictionaries (word/concept lists) if the analysis is strictly of written text). In all cases the coding instrumentation is established *a priori*, and the goal is to create a coding plan that is so carefully defined that virtually anyone, with sufficient training, can serve as a reliable coder. This contrasts sharply with DA, for which the researcher serves as the measurement instrument. Hence, the measures and analysis are highly dependent on the expertise and orientations of the researcher(s). Fittingly, DA has been characterized as “techniques *plus* perspective/assumptions” (i.e., method *plus* epistemology). With CA, the epistemology is a given—an endorsement of the scientific method.

### **DA and CA Used Together**

As noted above, triangulation of methods—i.e., approaching a research question from multiple methodological stances—is the ideal. When the findings agree, the conclusions of the researchers are strengthened multi-fold (Gray & Densten, 1998). Unfortunately, few studies have combined CA and qualitative message analysis. One example is Miller, Wiley, Fung, and Liang’s study (1997) of storytelling in Taiwanese and European American families, which combined in-home ethnographic fieldwork with content-analytic coding of audio and video recordings of naturally occurring talk in the home. They concluded (1) that personal storytelling operates as an important socializing practice for children ages 2–6 in widely different cultures, (2) with Chinese families more likely to use storytelling to convey moral and social standards, and European American families more likely to employ stories for entertainment and affirmation. The former (1) was a conclusion that could be drawn from the in-home observation, while the latter (2) was a finding derived from the systematic CA coding of the recordings.

DA and CA seem a good fit for such triangulation, although not for precise replication. DA provides a rich source of contextual data, and provides a “big picture” of a realm of communication activity, ostensibly leaving no stone unturned in a consideration of all critical messages. Such a diverse



collection is not generally conducted in CA. DA is therefore more likely to allow the discovery of the variety and texture of communication. From the standpoint of a content analyst, DA gives a multitude of “clues” that go beyond the typical preparation (via literature review and “immersion” in a message pool) for a CA.

For example, Hardy and Phillips’ (1999) study of the discourse concerning the Canadian refugee system uses the full power of DA to establish a network of meaning. They examined legislation and the statements of government officials and NGO leaders and others to analyze the institutional field of the refugee. Plus, they used editorial cartoons to explore the societal-level discourse. Their analysis of cartoons uncovered prototypical portrayals of refugees and of the refugee system itself that would most likely go undiscovered via CA. But a future CA could make use of the findings to effect a more broad-based study of cartoons, creating a realistic, summary picture of the “message pool” available to various publics at various periods in time. Additionally, a CA adds the pedigree of reliability—an assurance that the findings are not entirely the product of one analyst’s opinion.

Conversely, a CA may serve as a stimulant to the conduct of a DA. For example, one unexpected finding of Smith’s (1999) study of women’s portrayals in U.S. commercial film was that films with more females in creative control (i.e., writing, directing, producing) presented more gender-typed portrayals of women.<sup>2</sup> This cries for a follow-up, and DA seems uniquely suited. A DA could assemble a fuller investigation of the network of discourse surrounding this trend, in order to begin to answer questions of how and why this phenomenon occurs. A variety of framings are probable within the institutional curve—e.g., it’s possible that the female film executives do not even perceive the portrayals as gender-typed. Here, CA provides the “clue” as to a critical pattern in message content that deserves a more in-depth look.

More generally, qualitative and quantitative investigations should routinely be used together. It is wrongheaded to proceed on any quantitative study without considering various conceptual definitions derived from the reflexive processes of qualitative research; it is equally wrongheaded to draw generalized conclusions about one’s qualitative findings without adding quantitative evidence on the prevalence and patterns of message occurrence.

### A Final Observation

Perhaps the most compelling—and startling—macro-level observation one can make from an examination and comparison of the two methods is in fact a social constructivist one. The *discourse* concerning DA reveals the approach to be one of inspection, introspection, and primacy of cognitive activity, with emphasis on reflection, discussion, and debate, while the discourse of CA is one of a more “industrial” milieu, with emphasis on production, output, and broad-based generalization. These framings correspond to views of DA as constructivist (with evident concern for the precision and validity of description and identification by the observer) and of CA as intersubjective (with evident concern for the shared

understanding of the research assumptions, process, and findings). It would be interesting to trace the roots of those creating such discourses; to situate the contexts of their training and identify the assumptions of their pedagogical origins. More importantly, it seems that a dialogue among DA and CA researchers might be well served to consider such discursive contrasts, and to consider how the approaches and advantages of the two techniques are complementary.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This distinction between objectivity and intersubjectivity is an intriguing and important one. Some researchers (e.g., Babbie, 1986) have acknowledged the unattainable nature of true objectivity in measurement, and have opted instead for a *goal of intersubjectivity*—i.e., such clear and publicly proclaimed assumptions and methods as to assure fully shared meaning among researchers.

<sup>2</sup> The operationalizations of gender-typing were derived primarily from a host of qualitative investigations, most of them critical-cultural.

### References

- Babbie, E. (1986). *Observing ourselves: Essays in social research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Charters, W. W. (1933). *Motion pictures and youth: A summary*. New York: Arno & The New York Times.
- Dale, E. (1935). *The content of motion pictures*. New York: Macmillan.
- Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with television: The violence profile. *Journal of Communication*, 26(2), 173-197.
- Gray, J. H., & Densten, I. L. (1998). Integrating quantitative and qualitative analysis using latent and manifest variables. *Quality & Quantity*, 32, 419-432.
- Greenberg, B. S. (1980). *Life on television: A content analysis of U.S. TV drama*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Hardy, C., & Phillips, N. (1999). No joking matter: Discursive struggle in the Canadian refugee system. *Organization Studies*, 20(1), 1-24.
- Hertog, J. K., & Fan, D. P. (1995). The impact of press coverage on social beliefs: The case of HIV transmission. *Communication Research*, 22, 545-574.
- Miller, P. J., Wiley, A. R., Fung, H., & Liang, C. H. (1997). Personal storytelling as a medium of socialization in Chinese and American families. *Child Development*, 68, 557-568.
- Naccarato, J. L., & Neuendorf, K. A. (1998). Content analysis as a predictive methodology: Recall, readership, and evaluations of business-to-business print advertising. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 38(3), 19-33.
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2002). *The content analysis guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rogan, R. G., & Hammer, M. R. (1995). Assessing message affect in crisis negotiations: An exploratory study.

## *World or Worlds? The Analysis of Content and Discourse*

**Karin Fierke**

Queens University Belfast  
*K.Fierke@queens-belfast.ac.uk*

There are many approaches to discourse analysis and I would be reluctant to try to capture its essence. Perhaps the most familiar use in International Relations has emphasised the construction of identity and difference.<sup>1</sup> However, scholars such as Crawford have focused on argument analysis,<sup>2</sup> Duffy, Frederking and Tucker on language games,<sup>3</sup> as have I in a somewhat different way<sup>4</sup>; Milliken on the sequencing of moves in foreign policy interactions,<sup>5</sup> Sylvan and Majeski on the construction of foreign policy choices,<sup>6</sup> Alker on an ethnomethodological/dramaturgical approach to studying how people play iterated Prisoner's Dilemma games<sup>7</sup> and Weldes on the discursive construction of the Cuban Missile Crisis, problematizing its status as a 'crisis.'<sup>8</sup> Not all of these scholars would refer to themselves as discourse analysts, but they are all in different ways dealing with the analysis of texts. As Milliken rightly points out, there is a stream of thinking among discourse analysts in international relations that rigor and systematic method should be avoided given their association with positivist method.<sup>9</sup> That discourse analysis, in contrast to the rigor and formal methods of content analysis, is relativistic, interpretive and a bit woolly minded is an assumption that is often shared by advocates and critics alike. This difference is often implied in the distinction between formal and informal.

I would like to argue that this dichotomy should be drawn into question. The difference between discourse analysis and content analysis has less to do with the degree of formality in the method per se than the methodological foundations on which the methods rest. I thus begin with a distinction between methodology and method. Methodology refers to those basic assumptions about the world we study, which are prior to the specific techniques adopted by the scholar undertaking research.<sup>10</sup> Methodology includes both ontology and epistemology; the question of whether they can be separated is at the heart of the methodological difference. My analysis revolves around a contrast of two ideal types, which are oversimplified to amplify the difference, recognizing that both traditions involve a diversity of approaches and assumptions. I will focus on four issues: the relationship between language and world; the question of stability vs. change: coding vs. interpretation; and the meaning of formality.

### **World or Worlds**

Both content analysis and discourse analysis revolve around the analysis of texts. However, they each assume a different understanding of the relationship between word and world. Do we assume that language functions as a label for discrete objects or subjects in the world or that it is constitutive of the world?<sup>11</sup> In the former case, the nature of being (ontology) is separate from the way of knowing (epistemology). The existence of objects or subjects is distinct from the labels we attach to them. On a very basic level, the ability to treat words as discrete categories is a necessary point of departure for their quantification. Arguably counting individual words requires their isolation from a context. More sophisticated forms of content analysis do attempt to cluster categories, to explore further entailments of a word, and overcome context-related deficiencies.<sup>12</sup> However, for the sake of contrast, we can say that the emphasis on quantification goes hand in hand with an assumption, building on the tradition of logical positivism, that language mirrors objects in the world.

By contrast, discourse analysis is more geared to an examination of the embeddedness of words in patterns of relationship. From this angle, the nature of being (ontology) cannot be separated from ways of knowing (epistemology). This is not to deny the obvious point that the material world exists independent of or prior to human society. It does, however presuppose that this material world has been dramatically altered by human interaction with it.<sup>13</sup> A tree branch, aside from being part of a tree, may be used as a weapon or formed into any number of human artifacts from chairs, to baseball bats, to totem poles to a beam in the structure of a house. Once the material object, that is, the tree branch, is shaped into a specific form, it has a place within a particular type of social context, where it has meaning in relation to other objects (e.g. chairs and types of rooms or totem poles and religious rites), particular uses (e.g. to sit on or dance around, respectively), and is part of a language or grammar (e.g. of homes or religion). Humans not only interact with nature, thereby transforming it, but with each other, forming, in the process, different types of culturally and historically specific practices and institutions that are also rule governed. The point is that if, in the first case, treating words as labels serves their quantification, in the second, treating them as systems of relationships requires an analysis of the grammars which constitute particular worlds. While in the first case, the world is assumed to exist as an objective place, populated by discrete objects, in the second, we are dealing with worlds plural. The subjects, objects and practices constituting the world of 16<sup>th</sup> century witchhunts, 18<sup>th</sup> century slave trading or 21<sup>st</sup> century terrorism are historically and culturally specific. The assumption of multiple possible worlds, rather than a single world to be discovered, is linked to other assumptions.

### **Discovering Content vs. Mapping Change**

Other contributions to this issue have made a distinction between the assumption of a stable world and meaning on the

part of content analysts, and a world of meaning in flux on the part of discourse analysts. Some discourse analysts would agree with this contrast. Based on my work, I would argue that it is too stark. There are periods when meanings become relatively fixed, and not least the Cold War. However, there are also periods of change, when relationships and practices are transformed. Content analysis, given its assumption of a fixed world, is more conducive to the analysis of continuity. Discourse analysis can deal with either periods of continuity or change, although the underlying assumption of multiple worlds is most evident when mapping the process by which worlds change. Most of the examples of argument analysis, cited by Crawford in this issue, are examples of attempts to map the transition between worlds. In her own work, she looks at the transformation of a world in which slavery was legitimate to one in which it became an illegitimate practice. My own work on the end of the Cold War mapped the transition from a world in which any kind of disarmament was considered irrational, and the Cold War was assumed to be a more or less permanent feature of international relations, to one in which disarmament, and a whole range of other previously unthinkable practices, became possible.<sup>14</sup> If the end is to map a process of world changing, then it stands to reason that the method cannot begin with the coding of categories chosen by the analyst, which then provide a template for searching texts. It is through the searching of texts plural that one identifies the process by which the central categories and entailments of one world relate to the transformation of that world as a whole. This happens on several levels. Arguments, as arguments, are part of the process of contestation. But this does not mean language is completely in flux. In fact, a process of contestation is often constituted in a shared language, which is a reflection of belonging to a shared world, albeit one undergoing change.

The following example of the politicization of nuclear deterrence in the 1980s makes this point.<sup>15</sup> Actors occupying very different political positions drew on a shared grammar of prisons in the process of contestation. Each of the parties articulated a distinct moral argument about nuclear deterrence, but they relied on a shared language in doing so. The key object was deterrence as a prison. The question was the form of action to be taken in relation to that prison: staying inside, escaping, being liberated or destroying the structure.

NATO: The prison cannot be escaped: we should maintain deterrence because it is a blessing that has prevented war in Europe for the last forty years.<sup>16</sup>

REAGAN: The prison can be escaped: we should develop technologies that will allow us to find security in ways other than threatening mutual destruction.<sup>17</sup>

PEACE MOVEMENTS: We need to be liberated from the prison: we are trapped in a way of thinking that is imprisoning us and keeping us from thinking about alternative solutions.<sup>18</sup>

GORBACHEV: The guillotine should be destroyed: we can develop a form of international politics based on civilized norms, but need to destroy our reliance on

deterrence and balance of power thinking.<sup>19</sup>

Once the shared components of a political language are identified it becomes possible to trace a transition, from one language game to another. I use the word language game rather than discourse to emphasize that language and practice - not incidentally relating to material objects such as nuclear weapons - are interwoven<sup>20</sup>. The structure of the change and the patterns are to be found in the context itself, in the meanings given by the actors to their world. If the analyst begins by pre-selecting a range of codes the richness of the context and change within it are likely to be lost. In this case, the change was also evident in a shared grammar of foundations (which were being maintained, repaired, dismantled or undermined by different actors) and intimate relations (involving marriage, divorce, emancipation, etc). What was accepted at an earlier point in time (that deterrence was a prison from which we could not escape, and a foundation of stability separating two alliance families) became the object of contestation. This provided the basis for mapping the transition from the relatively stable world of the Cold War, and the division of Europe, to a new world of a Europe transcending East and West.

### **Objective Quantification vs. Subjective Interpretation**

That the scholar who codes categories is engaged in objective quantification is often contrasted with claims that discourse analysts bring subjective interpretation or their own perceptions to the reading of texts. However, building on the example above, I would argue that the centrality of a shared language at a site of contestation draws the latter into question. It is no more subjective to identify a grammar based, for instance, on a system of relationships between prisons, liberation, escape or destruction, than to quantify the number of times a word or cluster of words occurs in texts relating to deterrence. Of course, individuals do interpret single texts in a variety of ways, and debates over the significance of this have a long history in political theory, focusing not least on the relationship between context, text and individual. My point is that the distinction between objective quantification and subjective interpretation begins to blur when the analysis covers a large number of texts, which would seem to be necessary in making any claims about an area such as international relations. The above study involved some six hundred texts. The patterns by which subjects, objects and practices were configured, and altered had very little to do with subjective interpretation on the part of the analyst or the subjects of analysis. The analysis focused on a shared language and grammars that frequently recurred across texts from different types of actors.

A single word can have any range of meanings when placed in a different context. A journal referee once pointed out that the word 'romance' in Russian had a whole range of different meanings than in English. However, when the word 'romance' is embedded in a cluster of other categories, such as 'unrequited love', a relationship between a strong masculine actor and a weak feminine one (a frequent correspondence in Russian public texts regarding the relationship be-



tween Russia and NATO in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War), the cluster of words in and of itself establishes the context.<sup>21</sup> The analyst may exercise some interpretation in focusing in on this particular cluster, as opposed to another, but the words themselves belong to a grammar of categories, which we would all recognize as belonging to intimate relationships, drawn on in this case to give meaning to the hierarchical relationship between post-Cold War NATO and Russia. The appearance and frequency of a particular grammar is not down to the interpretation of the analyst. These patterns emerge across texts and are discovered by the analyst. The danger of going to any particular set of texts with a range of predetermined categories, for the purposes of coding, is that the world of analysis is limited from the start by the choices, and thus arguably the interpretation, of the analyst.

### The Meaning of Formal Analysis

Quantification is *easier* if single words are quantified rather than patterns of relationships between subjects, objects and practices within a world. Many content analysts have embraced the greater complexity of analyzing clusters of relationships and are therefore engaging in practices that are not dissimilar to the one described above. The question is what is gained or lost in the translation into numbers. What is gained is credibility within a world of science that values quantification over other forms of analysis and one in which the word formal has acquired the meaning of using quantification. What is potentially lost is the very human, social and political processes by which actors call the world around them into question. If formal is taken to mean systematic and rigorous analysis, then there are numerous examples of scholars engaged in discourse analysis who, with this definition, can be considered to be formal analysts. This redefinition may seem problematic in so far as the term formal analysis is derived from a scientific grammar, which includes categories of measurement, replication and quantification, which have been acquired from the natural sciences. However, the obvious difference between the work of the natural scientist and the social scientist is that content analysis *cannot* be a method of the former. The natural scientist has a freedom to impose meaning on the natural world. The social scientist does not because the subjects of analysis are meaning creating creatures. We thus inevitably are involved in negotiation with the subjects of study and cannot hope to provide an accurate representation of their world if we simply impose our own categories. We also have a greater responsibility to recognize that we too are situated in a social world, constrained by relations of power and meaning, which are defined within historical and cultural contexts. Critical theorists have long expressed a concern that the assumption of a stable and universal world serves to legitimize existing structures of power and meaning. It is this difference between the desire to know and understand a stable world vs. a changing world that most distinguishes the two approaches. Quantification is more complicated in the latter case, but not impossible. However, in either case there remains a question of the threshold at which a pattern can be claimed as a pattern.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Roxanne Lynne Doty, 'Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines,' *International Studies Quarterly* 37(30), pp. 297-320; and *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Iver Neumann, *Uses of the Other: 'The East' in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Neta C. Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> G. Duffy, B. Frederking and Seth A. Tucker, 'Language Games: Dialogical Analyses of INF Negotiations,' *International Studies Quarterly* 42(2) 1998, pp. 271-294.

<sup>4</sup> K.M. Fierke, *Changing Games, Changing Strategies: Critical Investigations in Security* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Milliken, *The Social Construction of the Korean War: Conflict and its Possibilities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Majeski and David Sylvan, 'How Foreign Policy Recommendations are Put Together,' *International Interactions*, 25 (4) pp. 301-332.

<sup>7</sup> Hayward Alker, *Rediscoveries and Reformulations: Humanistic Methodologies for International Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also: Hayward Alker and David Sylvan, 'Some Contributions of Discourse Analysis in Political Science,' *Kosmopolis* 24 (3), pp. 5-25.

<sup>8</sup> Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The US and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Milliken, 'Discourse Study: Bringing Rigor to Critical Theory,' pp.136-159, in: K.M. Fierke and Knud Erik Jorgensen, *Constructing International Relations: The Next Generation* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), p. 136. She points in particular to the arguments of Ashley, Walker and Campbell.

<sup>10</sup> This distinction is also made by Cynthia Hardy, Bill Harley and Nelson Phillips, 'Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis: Two Solitudes?' (This issue)

<sup>11</sup> This issue is examined in greater depth in: K. Fierke, 'Links Across the Abyss: Language and Logic in International Relations,' *International Studies Quarterly*(2002) 46, 331-354.

<sup>12</sup> See the section on Quantitative Content Analysis, in Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott, 'Identity as a Variable, Unpublished paper, May 10, 2003, p. 17

<sup>13</sup> This discussion is adapted from: K.Fierke, 'Cause or Constitution,' Chapter One, *Diplomatic Interventions: Conflict and Change in a Globalising World* (forthcoming, Palgrave Press)

<sup>14</sup> K.M. Fierke, *Changing Games, Changing Strategies: Critical Investigations in Security* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> This is taken from: K.M. Fierke, 'Constructing an Ethical Foreign Policy: Analysis and Practice from Below,' in: K.Smith and M.Light, *Ethics and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)



<sup>16</sup> W. Hofmann, 'Is NATO's Defence Policy Facing a Crisis?' *NATO Review* 32 : 2 (1984).

<sup>17</sup> Ronald Reagan, 'The Geneva Summit,' *Current Policy* 766 (1985).

<sup>18</sup> Mary Kaldor, 'Liberating Ourselves from Cold War Ideologies,' *END Journal* 10 (1984).

<sup>19</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, 'Gorbachev Talks to Moscow Peace Forum,' *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 39: 7 (1987).

<sup>20</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), par. 7.

<sup>21</sup> See: K.M. Fierke, Besting the West: Russia's Machiavellian Strategy, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 1: 3 (1999), pp. 403-434.

---

### **Announcement: APSA 2004 Panels**

#### *1. Roundtable on the state of the field of American Politics: Views from American Political Development*

Chair: Howard L. Reiter

Participants: Daniel P. Carpenter, Ira Katznelson, Karen Orren, and Paul Pierson

#### *2. Causal Explanations and Case Studies: World War I and the End of the Cold War*

Chair: Gary Goertz

Richard Ned Lebow, "Contingency, Catalysts and International System Change."

Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War: Reevaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas."

Paul W. Schroeder, "Embedded Counterfactuals and World War I as an Unavoidable War."

Robert D. English, "Power, Ideas, and New evidence on the Cold War's End."

Jack S. Levy, "Necessary Conditions in Case Studies: Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in July 1914."

Discussant: James Mahoney

#### *3. The Analysis of Political Regimes*

Chair: Scott Mainwaring

Gerardo L. Munck, "Political Regimes in the Post-Cold War Era."

Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "The Dynamics of Competitive Authoritarianism: Explaining Hybrid Change in the Post-Cold War Era."

Jose Antonio Cheibub and Jennifer Gandhi, "Classifying Political Regimes: An Extension and an Update."

Scott Mainwaring and Anibal Perez-Linan, "Studying Latin American Regimes, 1945-99."

Discussant: Susan C. Stokes

#### *4. Alternative Pedagogies of Qualitative Research*

Chair: Cecelia Lynch

Hayward R. Alker, "Pedagogical Principles of Methodological Pluralism"

Raymond D. Duvall, "Pedagogies of Critical Social Theory."  
David Sylvan, "In the Field: Qualitative Methods, Discipline and Practice."

Discussant: Alexander Wendt

#### *5. Roundtable on Mixed Methods in Post-Communist Russia*

Chair: Mitchell A. Orenstein

Participants: Anna M. Grzymala-Busse, Keith A. Darden, Jason Wittenberg, Yoshiko M. Herrera, and David D. Laitin

#### *6. Analyzing Necessary and Sufficient Causes: Applications and Issues*

Chair: David Collier

Gary Goertz, "Assessing the Importance of Necessary or Sufficient Conditions in Fuzzy-set Social Science."

James Mahoney, "Explaining the Great Reversal in Spanish America: Statistical Analysis vs. Fuzzy-Set Analysis."

Jason Seawright, "Qualitative Comparative Analysis vis-a-vis Regression: Comparing the Underlying Assumptions."

Gunnar Grendstad, "A Boolean Approach to Party Preference: A Five-Country Study."

Discussants: Jonathan N. Katz and David Collier

#### *7. Roundtable on Uses of Language in Constructivist International Relations*

Chair: Audie Klotz

Participants: Jeffrey T. Checkel, Roxanne Doty, Matthew J. Hoffmann, Cecelia Lynch and Iver B. Neumann

#### *8. QCA/FS: The State of the Art and Future Prospects*

Chair: Benoit Rihoux

Badredine Arfi, "Aggregating Causality in Multiple-Level Theories: A Linguistic Fuzzy Logic Approach."

Sakura Yamasaki, "Social Network Analysis and Qualitative Comparative Analysis: An Exploratory Study."

Carsten Schneider and Claudius Wagemann, "The Fuzzy-Set/QCA Two-Step Approach to Middle-Range Theories."

Benoit Rihoux, "On the Use, Misuse, and Good Use of QCA: State of the Art and Prospects."

Discussant: Andrew Bennett

#### *9. Philosophies of Qualitative Sociopolitical Inquiry*

Chair: Janice Bially Mattern

Gavan Duffy and Evelyn Goh, "Testing Sincerity: Henry Kissinger's Opening Encounter With the Chinese Leadership."

Michael J. Shapiro, "Political Theory versus The Fetishism of Method."

Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, "Language, Legitimation, and the American Empire."

Discussants: Janice Bially Mattern and David Dessler