Discourse and Interaction

Introduction

The study of social interaction in order to understand how people construct the world around them was important for linguists. In this perspective, it has not necessarily been the case that the object of analysis has been understood or as "discourse" .

The notion of "discourse" has become important

1. It has become clear that the specifics of linguistic practices are linked to more broadly shared, and ideologically framed, ways of using language.

2. At the same time, the study of discourse has increasingly come to include the study of the conditions of production of discourse (whatever its form), and hence to draw on analyses of interactions.

The relationship between Interaction and Discourse

What we have thought we can learn has the following major threads:

(1) the nature of the interactional, discursive mechanics of the social construction of reality, and, in particular, what dimensions of these mechanics are universal and what are culturally, socially, or historically contingent or even specific;

(2) the nature of the relationship between those mechanics and the conditions of their existence.

Put differently, our goals have been (1) to explore the nature of discourse in interaction itself as a way of understanding how we construct social reality,

(2) and to explain what we understand to be the nature of discourse in terms of the social, political, and economic conditions of discursive production.

(how is social reality constructed?) had been long expressed in a variety of ways within the disciplines of philosophy, social psychology , sociology, and anthropology, in the context of new interests in focusing on the structure and function of talk. These new interests can be in part explained through reactions against universalist nonempirical tendencies in linguistic and social theory, in part perhaps simply through the availability of the tape recorder as a data collection device for fieldwork.

What is central here is a combination of concerns rooted in the emerging disciplines of ethnomethodology/ conversation analysis, pragmatics, linguistic anthropology, and sociolinguistics. These concerns focus on discovering the patterns of discourse as they emerge in understanding them as primary acts of meaning- interaction, and on making.

The second thread: to link discourse patterns to the conditions of their production

Different works see discourse not as a product of conditions of interaction, but rather as dialectically embedded in them. In this perspective, discourse in interaction becomes a privileged site for analyzing social action and social structure (and the relationship between the two).

1. The Social Construction of Reality

The nature of interactional processes

Two categories can be mentioned :

1. *ethnomethodologist*

2. and *interpretivist* (or *interactionist*).

The major distinction between the two approaches

Ethnomethodologist	interpretivist
1. has a strong preference for restricting analysis to what is actually observable.	1. is prepared to bring other sources of data to bear on the analysis of interactional data.
2. perhaps has the strongest tendency to treat interactional data as text. The object of analysis is the text of the transcription of the interaction, whether the text is a literal, verbal one, based on audiotapes, or whether it combines verbal and nonverbal material, as has become possible with the availability of videorecording.	

These interactions can be shown to be nonrandom; it was possible to uncover the normative order indexed by interactional routines by breaching those routines and watching all hell break loose. The patterns observed in interactional data are held to point to an "underlying pattern".

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This "underlying pattern" is some form of social order. While it is not clear exactly what form of social order is involved here, the ethnomethodological insight is that it is possible to see it by discovering its manifestations in the normative order of interaction, and especially where that normative order is breached. Other sociologists, notably Goffman, also were concerned to discover social order through the patterns of everyday life, arguing that much of what happens interactionally is the construction and reconstruction of forms of normative social order.

Schegloff , Jefferson and Sacks laid the groundwork for *conversation analysis*, ethnomethodology's major contribution to the analysis of discourse in interaction.

Conversation analysis focuses on the discovery of the patterns whereby people orient themselves (and each other) to specific dimensions of some underlying normative order. Frequently, these have concerned the normative order of talk itself, that is, how talk is supposed to be organized.

Most important here have been studies concerned with:

(1) how participants construct an orientation to talk, that is, how they make themselves available to each other for the purposes of interaction and otherwise organize their orientation to each other and to the activity at hand;

(2) the distribution of talk among participants; and

(3) how participants construct an orientation to a topic of conversation. In addition to a focus on observable routines, ethnomethodologists look at the structure of conversation, notably at such phenomena as turn-taking; sequencing and adjacency; and, of course, repair, which highlights the normative order by analyzing its breakdown and reconstruction.

Reasons why the normative order of talk might be interesting

1. For some, the underlying pattern it relates to is cognitive and potentially universal: what the normative order of talk reveals is the way in which we, as sentient organisms, organize our experience and understand it.

2. For others, the interest lies in the direction of the social order, which requires relating the normative order of talk to other dimensions of social relations, that is, to the normative regulation of relations among people who bear some set of (normatively salient) relations to each other as well as to others who can be said to be interactionally "present", but who do not themselves speak (or write) in the universal, but is more interaction at issue. Here the underlying pattern might be likely historically contingent.

Ethnomethodological methods provide a way to do three thingS

1.to discover how interaction contributes to the construction of a social order which extends far beyond any given analyzable interaction;

2. to examine how the relationship between social action and social structure constrains how individuals can come to know and act in their world.

3. to identify the interactional manifestations of social problems

One can note the development in works of sociology, anthropology, semantics, which turned into the field of pragmatics.

Work has tended to focus on interactions in institutional settings, for a variety of reasons. One is that the problem of the relationship between interaction, culture, and social order can be seen as a problem of a relationship between interaction and social institutions, which themselves can be taken as social categories (such as gender) or as organized realms of activity (such as regulation of behavior, management of health, or socialization).

One can look at this body of work as motivated in two ways:

1. The first motivation consists of attempts to understand how interaction in institutional settings produces knowledge about what is important in the world and how to act in it , how it produces knowledge about the physical world, notably the body, and how it produces and reproduces the moral order, notably through the legal and political systems.

(Patient, doctor, teacher, student……., diagnosis, learning, legal defense………)

2. The second kind of motivation concerns applying conversation analytic tools to the understanding of the kind of work institutions do, that is, what it is that they actually produce.

(If we look at the educational setting, we can understand the production and reproduction of the different social categories).

2 Situating Interactions

A central issue in the study of the construction of social categories has been the source and nature of the differences involved. Both studies of gender and of intercultural communication have pointed out that members of different social categories use different conversational routines, which in turn index different frames of reference.

The question is:

To what extent these palpable cultural differences are the result of distinct socialization experiences, and to what extent they are the result of different social positions with respect to the distribution of power .

The answer to that question has implications for understanding the ways in which such differences may enter into the construction of relations which are perceived (at least by somebody) as being problematic, normally because they lead to misunderstanding (and hence an inability to accomplish goals, to gain , to conflict, or to some form of unequal treatment.

The question of how to situate interactions with respect to other forms of social life became a central analytical problem, one which came to be posed as a problem of understanding the nature of context.

one of the powerful means by which interaction functions to produce and reproduce the social order is by indexing the frames of reference with respect to which local action is interpretable. Clearly, those frames of reference were an important locus for understanding social order, but the only means to address their nature would be through understanding the process of indexing, or of *contextualization* itself, that is, the process by which frames of reference are called into play, defined and modified in interaction. Auer defines it as follows: "(C)ontextualization . . . comprises all activities by participants which make relevant, maintain, revise, cancel . . . any aspect of context which, in turn, is responsible for the interpretation of an utterance in its particular locus of occurrence."

The relationship between interaction and context

In sociology, this relationship has long been thought of as one between so-called macrosocial processes and structures and so-called microlevel ones.

Empirically it does not seem possible to identify phenomena anywhere other than at the so-called microlevel (this is, of course, why people started examining interactional data in the first place). If the macrolevel is not empirically observable, what use is there in maintaining the concept? On the other hand, as we have seen, it is impossible to explain everything that goes in at the microlevel by focusing on particular interactions, no matter how carefully chosen.

The linkages among interactions

There are two main ways in which people have tried to do this:

1. through examining the traces within interactions of their linkages with others. The study of contextualization processes certainly forms part of this endeavor, but it has also taken other forms.

Some of these interactions which have an observable outcome usually in the form of a decision of some kind, are called "gate-keeping" encounters, because the decisions taken there affect activists' access to resources.

2. to practice what Marcus (1986) calls "multi-locale ethnography," that is, to focus on more than one interaction in order to discover the spatial, temporal, and most importantly social linkages among them.

It also developed concepts which can be understood in a similar way, in particular the notion of *communicative repertoire*, as well as the concept of *speech situation* or *speech event*.

Thank you