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Introduction

1.1 What is Discourse Analysis?

People in a variety of academic departments and disciplines use the term “discourse analysis” for what they do, how they do it, or both. Many of these people, though by no means all, have some training in general linguistics, and some would identify themselves primarily as linguists. Others, however, would identify themselves primarily with other fields of study, such as anthropology, communication, cultural studies, psychology, or education, to list just a few of the possibilities, and some situate their work in the interdisciplinary endeavor of discourse studies. Discourse analysts pose many different questions and propose many different sorts of answers. In one journal issue devoted to discourse analysis (Basham, Fiksdal, and Rounds, 1999), for example, there are papers by eleven people who all think of what they do as discourse analysis. One of these authors talks about the descriptive terms used of the African-American defendant in the media coverage of a murder trial. One talks about differences between English and Japanese. One describes newspaper coverage of a prison scandal in England. Another discusses metaphor, and another analyzes expressions of identity in Athabaskan (Native American) student writing. One talks about a poem, and there is a paper about the epitaph of the spiritual master of a sect of Muslims and one about whether the pronoun *I* should appear in formal writing. One paper is about the connection between personal pronouns and the human experience of selfhood, one is about political debate, one is about using case studies as a way of studying sociolinguistic variation. The papers make points such as these: media coverage of the murder trial was racist; the Japanese word *jinkaku*, used in Japan’s new post-World War II constitution as an equivalent for the English expression *individual dignity*, both represented and shaped a particularly Japanese way of thinking and talking about the public person; female US college students describing seminars used metaphors of sharing whereas male students used metaphors of competing; poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins operate on numerous levels at once; a Bektashi Muslim community in the United States manages to maintain a sense of cultural continuity despite massive cultural and geographical changes and in several radically different languages; students need a voice with which to write in academia.

It might appear that the only thing all these projects have in common is that, in one way or another, they all involve studying language and its effects. Is discourse analysis, then, simply the study of language and its effects? It has been described that way. It has been suggested, for example, that “the name for the field ‘discourse analysis’...says

nothing more or other than the term ‘linguistics’: the study of language” (Tannen, 1989: 6). In a way, this is exactly correct: discourse analysis is the study of language, in the everyday sense in which most people use the term. What most people mean when they say “language” is talk, communication, discourse. (In formal language study, both descriptive and prescriptive, the term “language” is often used differently, to refer to structures or rules that are thought to underlie talk.) Even if discourse analysis is, basically, “the study of language,” however, it is useful to try to specify what makes discourse analysis different from other approaches to language study. One way to do this is by asking ourselves what we can learn by thinking about what “discourse” is, and about what “analysis” is.

1.1.1 “Discourse”

To discourse analysts, “discourse” usually means actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language, although some define the term more broadly as “meaningful symbolic behavior” in any mode (Blommaert, 2005: 2). “Discourse” in this sense is usually a mass noun. Discourse analysts typically speak of *discourse* rather than *discourses*, the way we speak of other things for which we often use mass nouns, such as *music* (“some music” or “three pieces of music” rather than “three musics”) or *information* (“the flow of information,” “a great deal of information,” rather than “thousands of informations”). Communication can, of course, involve other media besides language. Media such as photography, clothing, music, architecture, and dance can be meaningful, too, and discourse analysts often need to think about the connections between language and other such modes of semiosis, or meaning-making.

Not all linguistic communication is spoken or written: there are manual languages, such as American Sign Language, whose speakers use gesture rather than sound or graphic signs. (It is conventional to use the word “speaker” as a cover term for people who are writing or gesturally signing in addition to those who employ the aural–oral mode. Doing this is convenient, but it also can make it seem as if spoken language is more natural, neutral, or normal than signing or writing are. We will return to this issue when we discuss media of communication in more detail in Chapter 7.)

Calling what we do “*discourse* analysis” rather than “language analysis” underscores the fact that we are not centrally focused on language as an abstract system. We tend, instead, to be interested in what happens when people draw on the knowledge they have about language, knowledge based on their memories of things they have said, heard, seen, or written before, to do things in the world: exchange information, express feelings, make things happen, create beauty, entertain themselves and others, and so on. This knowledge – a set of generalizations, which can sometimes be stated as rules, about what words generally mean, about what goes where in a sentence, and so on – is what is often referred to as “language,” when language is thought of as an abstract system of rules or structural relationships. Discourse is both the source of this knowledge (people’s generalizations about language are made on the basis of the discourse they participate in) and the result of it (people apply what they already know in creating and interpreting new discourse).

Scholars influenced by Foucault (1972, 1980) sometimes use “discourse” in a related but somewhat different sense, as a count noun. “Discourses” in this sense can be enumerated and referred to in the plural. They are conventional ways of talking that both create and are created by conventional ways of thinking. These linked ways of

talking and thinking constitute ideologies (sets of interrelated ideas) and serve to circulate power in society. In other words, “discourses” in this sense involve patterns of belief and habitual action as well as patterns of language. Discourses are ideas as well as ways of talking that influence and are influenced by the ideas. Discourses, in their linguistic aspect, are conventionalized sets of choices for discourse, or talk. Some discourse analysts distinguish the two meanings of “discourse” orthographically, using Discourse (with a capital D) for the former and discourse (with a lower-case d) for the latter (Gee, 2014). As we will see throughout this book (particularly in Chapter 2), the two senses of the word “discourse,” as a mass noun (“discourse”) and as a count noun (“discourses”), are crucially connected.

1.1.2 “Analysis”

Why discourse *analysis* rather than “discourseology,” on the analogy of “phonology,” “discourseography,” on the analogy of “ethnography,” or “discourse criticism,” on the analogy of “literary criticism” or “rhetorical criticism”? The answer has to do with the fact that discourse analysis typically focuses on the analytical process in a relatively explicit way. It is useful to think of discourse analysis as analogous to chemical analysis. Like chemical analysis, discourse analysis is a set of methods that can be used in answering many kinds of questions. As we have already seen, discourse analysts start out with a variety of research questions, and these research questions are often not questions that only discourse analysts ask. Instead, they are often questions that discourse analysts share with other people, both in linguistics and in other fields. Some discourse analysts ask questions that are traditionally asked in linguistics: questions about linguistic structure, about language change, about meaning, about language acquisition. Other discourse analysts ask questions that are more interdisciplinary: questions about such things as social roles and relations, power and inequality, communication and identity. What distinguishes discourse analysis from other sorts of study that bear on human language and communication lies not in the questions discourse analysts ask but in the ways they try to answer them: by analyzing discourse – that is, by examining aspects of the structure and function of language in use.

Perhaps the most familiar use of the word “analysis” is for processes, mental or mechanical, for taking things apart. Chemical analysis, for example, involves using a variety of mechanical techniques for separating compounds into their elemental parts. Mental analysis is also involved, as the chemist thinks in advance about what the compound’s parts are likely to be. Linguistic analysis is also sometimes a process of taking apart. Discourse analysts often find it useful to divide longer stretches of discourse into parts according to various criteria and then look at the particular characteristics of each part. Divisions can be made according to who is talking, for example, where the paragraph boundaries are, when a new topic arises, or where the subject ends and the predicate begins. Are grammatical patterns different when social superiors are talking than when their subordinates are? Does new information tend to come in the first sentence of a paragraph? Are topic changes signaled by special markers? Do sentence subjects tend to be slots in which events or actions or feelings can be presented as things? Discourse can be taken apart into individual words and phrases, and concordances of these – sets of statistics about where a particular word is likely to occur, how frequent it is, what words tend to be close to it – can be used to support claims about how grammar works or what words are used to mean.

But analysis can also involve taking apart less literally. One way of analyzing something is by looking at it in a variety of ways. An analysis in this sense might involve systematically asking a number of questions, systematically taking several theoretical perspectives, or systematically performing a variety of tests. Such an analysis could include a breaking-down into parts. It could also include a breaking-down into functions (What is persuasive discourse like? What is narrative like?), or according to participants (How do men talk in all-male groups? How do psychotherapists talk? What is newspaper writing like?), or settings (What goes on in classrooms? In workplaces? In sororities?), or processes (How do children learn to get the conversational floor? How do people create social categories like “girl” or “foreigner” or “old person” as they talk to and about each other?).

Discussion

- 1.1 One good way to begin to think about what discourse analysis involves is by thinking about, or, if you can, practicing translation. If you know another language well enough, try translating each of the following into it:
 - a) We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. (The US Declaration of Independence)
 - b) “That’s water under the bridge.”
“Don’t count your chickens before they hatch.” (traditional proverbs)
 - c) May the Force be with you. (“Star Wars” movies)
 - d) To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether ’tis Nobler in the mind to suffer
The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune,
Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them ... (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*)
 - e) I Can Has Cheezburger? (internet weblog)
What decisions have to be made as you do this? What cultural resonances are lost as these sentences are taken out of the English (and, in the case of (a), United States) context? What resonances are added as they are articulated with another language and culture? Are there grammatical possibilities in English that do not exist in another of your languages, and vice versa? What other kinds of texts or utterances does each text echo or draw on, in English and in other languages? Who would say things like these, to whom, in what circumstances, in each language? Why would these things be said? Are they usually said in writing, or orally, or in other media? Discuss whether it is ever possible to say the same thing in a different language, in a different style, in a different medium, or in a different situation.
- 1.2 In what other contexts have you analyzed written texts or conversations, systematically or unsystematically? Is the analysis of discourse ever involved in the study of literature? In history? In medicine or the law? What kinds of informal discourse analysis go on in homes and workplaces, when people try to figure out what written texts mean, how best to write or speak, what is going on in a conversation? What kinds of questions do people ask themselves and others as they do such analyses?

1.2 Some Uses of Discourse Analysis

As we have seen, discourse analysis has been used in answering many different kinds of questions. Some of these questions have to do with language. What is involved in “knowing a language”? How do words, sentences, and utterances get associated with meanings? How does language change? How do children learn to talk and how do people learn new languages? Linguists have long been interested in the structure of words (morphology) and sentences (syntax). Discourse analysts have moved the description of structure up a level, looking at actual stretches of connected text or transcript of talk and providing descriptions of the structure of paragraphs, stories, and conversations. Language scholars also ask questions about meaning (semantics), and in a natural progression from work in semantics and syntax, discourse analysts have asked about what goes where in stretches of talk longer than words or phrases. Discourse analysis has shed light on how meaning can be created via the arrangement of chunks of information across a series of sentences or via the details of how a conversationalist takes up and responds to what has just been said. Discourse analysis sheds light on how speakers indicate their semantic intentions and how hearers interpret what they hear, and on the cognitive abilities that underlie human symbol use. In the field of pragmatics, discourse analysts looking at corpora of actual talk have helped to describe the culturally shaped interpretive principles on which understanding is based and how people (and sometimes other entities) are thought to perform actions by means of utterances. Work on cohesion examines the meanings of utterances in their linguistic contexts.

Traditional approaches to questions about linguistic variation and language change involve examining psychological mechanisms (such as speakers’ tendency to treat new words as analogous to old ones, adapting foreign sounds and words to the phonological and morphological patterns of the borrowing language) as well as social, historical, and interactional ones (such as geographical or social isolation of one group from another, which often leads to divergence in the ways they pronounce words and construct phrases and sentences). Discourse analysts have contributed to the study of variation and change from both perspectives. Looking at records of discourse over time, discourse analysts have described mechanisms of change having to do with what happens in interaction. For example, forms that regularly serve useful functions in suggesting how speakers intend their words to be taken at a particular moment are sometimes “grammaticalized,” changing over time into required elements of a language’s grammar (Hopper and Traugott, 2003). Discourse analysts have also described larger-scale social and material influences that effect changes in patterns of language use, influences such as economic change, geographic mobility, and power relations, and they have studied patterns of variation in how people do things with talk such as making lists, constructing arguments, and telling stories.

Discourse analysts have also contributed to research on language acquisition. They have helped describe how speakers acquire new competence and what it is they are acquiring. In first-language acquisition research, discourse analysis has a long history, dating back at least to important work by Ferguson (1977) and others about the special simplified ways in which some people display the regularities of grammar as they talk to children. This research called into question the claim that innate linguistic knowledge was required for language learning to be possible. Work by discourse analysts on

“foreigner talk” and “teacher talk” followed. Among the many discourse analysts who have added to our understanding of *what* language learners acquire are students of “contrastive rhetoric” and “contrastive pragmatics.” They have shown that knowing a language means not just knowing its grammar and vocabulary but also knowing how to structure paragraphs and arguments and participate in conversations the way speakers of the language do, and it means understanding which sentence types can accomplish which purposes in social interaction: what might work as an apology, for example, or how to decline an invitation.

Discourse analysts also help answer questions about the roles of language in human cognition, art, and social life which have been asked for centuries. Students of literary style are discourse analysts (though they may not call themselves that) and they, along with folklorists and ethnographers of communication, have been exploring artistic uses of language, and the role of aesthetics and “performance” in all language use, for many years. Rhetorical study has always involved discourse analysis, explicit or not, as rhetoricians have analyzed relatively self-conscious, public, strategically designed talk and writing to see what makes it work. Discourse analysts have helped us understand why people tell stories, what the functions of “small talk” are, how people adapt language to specialized situations like teaching and psychotherapy, what persuasion is and how it works, how people negotiate the multiple roles and identities they may be called on to adopt.

Discourse analysis continues to be useful in answering questions that are posed in many fields that traditionally focus on human life and communication, such as anthropology, psychology, communication, and sociology, as well as in fields in which the details of discourse have not always been thought relevant, such as geography, psychology, political science, human–computer interaction, medicine, law, public policy, and business. Anyone who wants to understand human beings has to understand discourse, so the potential uses of discourse analysis are almost innumerable. Discourse analysts help answer questions about social relations, such as dominance and oppression or solidarity. Discourse analysis is useful in the study of personal identity and social identification, as illustrated by work on discourse and gender or discourse and ethnicity. Discourse analysis has been used in the study of how people define and create lifespan processes such as aging and disability as they talk, how decisions are made, resources allocated, and social adaptation or conflict accomplished in public and private life. To the extent that discourse and discourses – meaning-making in linguistic and other modes, and ways of acting, being, and envisioning self and environment – are at the center of human experience and activity, discourse analysis can help in answering any question that could be asked about humans in society.

1.3 Facets of Discourse Analysis

To introduce some of the kinds of questions discourse analysis can raise and help answer, and to lay out the analytical heuristic around which this book is organized, we begin with a set of brief examples. These exploratory analyses of small bits of text all deal with aspects of a familiar genre of discourse, the discourse directed to the public by an institution – in this case, an art museum. My purpose in presenting these mini-analyses is not to make any general point about the discourse and discourses of

museums, or about how institutions construct and manipulate their publics, or about how ancient civilizations are commodified, exoticized, or made to seem threatening through the ways we talk about them, or about how condescending educational discourse can be – although all these angles are suggested in this analysis and would be worth pursuing further. My goal is simply to illustrate a few ways in which a systematic analysis of discourse can help illuminate facets of the communication process that are important but not immediately apparent.

The discourse to be analyzed here consists of what might be called popular Egyptology, in the form of advertising for, and informational material about, a museum exhibit called “Splendors of Ancient Egypt.” (By “popular Egyptology” I mean non-academic talk, writing, and other representations of ideas about ancient Egypt, ranging from serious books about Egypt for general audiences to humorous uses of imagery involving mummies, hieroglyphic writing, body poses taken from Egyptian bas-reliefs and statuary, and so on.) The “Splendors of Ancient Egypt” exhibit traveled to several US museums, including the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas (MFAH). The exhibit consisted of over 200 artifacts from all phases of ancient Egyptian history, including coffins and mummy masks, statues, scrolls, and relief carvings in stone. The objects were on loan from the Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim, Germany, and the exhibit was jointly designed and mounted by Hildesheim curators and Houston ones. The material I will discuss comes from the Houston show, as well as from descriptions of, and advertisements for, the show and for related events.

The MFAH presented this exhibit as a “blockbuster,” advertising it heavily and using it as a tool for raising museum attendance and increasing membership. This effort, and the show itself, gave rise to many texts, including magazine advertisements for the exhibit; articles about it in the bimonthly magazine sent to museum members, *MFA Today*; wall placards and labels in the exhibit; and some material that was available at the special “Splendors” gift shop outside the exhibit. (Because the exhibit took place in 1996–7, before the widespread use of the internet, there was no online advertising or educational material.) I present brief analyses of bits of this material to illustrate the approach to discourse analysis that will be taken in the chapters to follow. Let me stress again that the point of what I will be doing here is illustrative. I will not be presenting a complete or coherent analysis of this popular-Egyptology data, just a few examples.

1.3.1 A Heuristic for Analysis

Before we start looking at this material, however, we need to consider our methodology. How are we going to proceed with these analyses? What questions should we ask, and how should we go about answering them? Discourse analysts work with material of many kinds, including transcripts of audio- or video-recorded interactions, written documents, texts transmitted via oral tradition such as proverbs, and online communication of various sorts. Their material sometimes consists of spoken words alone and sometimes includes pictures, typography, gestures, gaze, and other modalities. But no matter what sort of discourse we consider – we discuss the “data” of discourse analysis later in the chapter – the basic questions a discourse analyst asks are “Why is this stretch of discourse the way it is? Why is it no other way? Why these particular words in this particular order?”

To answer these questions, we obviously need to think about what our “text” is about, since clearly what a person is talking about has a bearing on what is said and how it is said. We also need to think about who said it, or who wrote it or signed it, who is thought, in its particular sociocultural context, to be responsible for what it says, who the intended audience was and who the actual hearers or readers were, because who the participants in a situation are and how their roles are defined clearly influences what gets said and how. We need to think about what motivated the text, about how it fits into the set of things people in its context conventionally do with discourse, and about what its medium (or media) of production and reception has to do with what it is like. We need to think about the language it is in, what that language encourages speakers and writers to do, and what it is relatively difficult to do in that language. We need to think about the text’s structure, and how it fits into larger structures of sets of texts and sets of interactions.

We can divide the questions that need to be asked about a text into six broad categories. Each of these categories corresponds to one way in which contexts shape texts and texts shape contexts. Each of these aspects of text-building is both a source of constraint – a reason why texts are typically some ways and not others – and a resource for creativity, as speakers, signers, and writers express themselves by manipulating the patterns that have become conventional. As we explore pieces of the “Splendors of Ancient Egypt” exhibit we will touch briefly on each of these facets of discourse in turn. We will consider each aspect in more detail in the chapters to follow.

Figure 1.1 lists these six aspects of the shaping of texts. These constitute a *heuristic* for exploring, in a systematic way, what is potentially interesting and important about a text or a set of texts. A heuristic is a set of discovery procedures for systematic application or a set of topics for systematic consideration. Unlike the procedures in a set of instructions (be they instructions for putting together a toy or instructions for analyzing a set of numerical data), the procedures of a heuristic do not need to be followed in any particular order, and there is no fixed way of following them. A heuristic is not a mechanical set of steps, and there is no guarantee that using it will result in a single definitive explanation. A heuristic can be compared to a set of exercises that constitute a whole-body physical workout, or to a set of tools for thinking with. A good heuristic draws on multiple theories rather than just one. The heuristic we use here forces us to think, for example, about how discourse is shaped by ideologies that circulate power in society, but it also forces us to think about how discourse is shaped by people’s memories of previous discourse, along with other sources of creativity and constraint. We may end up deciding, in a particular

- ❖ Discourse is shaped by the world, and discourse shapes the world.
- ❖ Discourse is shaped by people’s purposes, and discourse shapes possible purposes.
- ❖ Discourse is shaped by linguistic structure, and discourse shapes linguistic structure.
- ❖ Discourse is shaped by participants, and discourse shapes participants.
- ❖ Discourse is shaped by prior discourse, and discourse shapes the possibilities for future discourse.
- ❖ Discourse is shaped by its media, and it shapes the possibilities of its media.

Figure 1.1 How discourse is shaped by its context, and how discourse shapes its context.

project, that the most useful approach will be one that gives us ways of identifying how ideology circulates through discourse, or that the most useful approach will be one that helps us describe “intertextuality,” or that the most useful approach will be one that helps uncover the relationships between the text and its medium, the language it is in, or its producers’ goals or social relationships. The heuristic is a first step in analysis which may help you see what sorts of theory you need in order to connect the observations about discourse you make as you use the heuristic with general statements about language, human life, or society. It is a way to ground discourse analysis in discourse, rather than starting with a pre-chosen theory and using your texts to test or illustrate the theory.

1.3.2 Texts and Interpretations of Texts are Shaped by the World, and They Shape the World

Discourse arises out of the world or worlds that are presumed to exist outside of discourse, the worlds of the creators and interpreters of texts. Whether or not discourse is thought to be about something is relevant to how it is interpreted. Discourse that is thought not to refer to anything may be seen as nonsensical or crazy; it may be the result of a linguistic experiment like Dadaism in poetry; it may be required in ritual. The Western tradition of thought about language has tended to privilege referential discourse and to imagine that discourse (at least ideally) reflects the pre-existing world. But as twentieth-century philosophers (Foucault, 1980), rhetoricians (Burke, [1945]1969), and linguists (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1941) showed us again and again, the converse is also true, or perhaps truer: human worlds are shaped by discourse.

For example, advertisements for “The Splendors of Ancient Egypt” which the MFAH placed in the *Texas Monthly*, a general circulation magazine, involved choices about how to *describe* the ancient Egyptian world which had the effect of *creating* a particular image of this world. The ancient Egyptian world is seen through the lens of Western “orientalism” (Said, 1978), or habitual Western ways of talking about the East which create the Eastern world of our imagination. Figure 1.2 shows the written parts of two of these advertisements. (The advertisements also include pictures of some of the artifacts in the show, and a discourse analysis could also consider their visual design, which highlights the most exotic and anthropomorphic of the artifacts and makes strategic use of layout and typography.)

Egyptians are depicted in these advertisements as “full of mystery,” “superstitious,” “obsessed with living forever,” “preoccupied with death.” Ancient Egyptians needed “spells” and “curses” and “incantations” to “protect them from harm.” Repeated from one ad to the other are the expressions *the ancient Egyptians*, *awe-inspiring*, *gilded mummy coffins*, and *this once in a lifetime exhibit*. The effect of all this is (perhaps exactly as intended) to foreground the “otherness” of the ancient Egyptians, the ways in which they were different from us and both more primitive (their superstitions) and more splendid (their elaborate jewelry and golden sarcophagi). Only a systematically critical reader would be likely to wonder whether some of the advertisements’ copy is not, in fact, equally descriptive of twenty-first-century Westerners. For example, “For a civilization obsessed with living forever, they sure [have] a peculiar preoccupation with death” could, in another context, be taken as an accurate description of the contemporary United States. In fact, even if not every society is interested in immortality, most human societies have rituals connected with death. In the context of the world

<p>For a civilization obsessed with living forever, they sure had a peculiar preoccupation with death.</p> <p>The ancient Egyptians felt so strongly about going to heaven, they spent their entire life getting ready for life after death. Now, in the new exhibit, "Splendors of Ancient Egypt," you can see for the first time the awe-inspiring treasures they packed to take along for the trip. Everything from gilded mummy coffins and gold mummy masks to dazzling jewelry and the 18-foot-long Book of the Dead. Altogether, over 200 pieces have been assembled for this once in a lifetime exhibit. Why not make plans for a trip of your own?</p> <p>(Texas Monthly)</p>	<p>If you doubt ancient Egyptian curses exist, be warned. This exhibit is full of them.</p> <p>The ancient Egyptians were a superstitious bunch. They had spells for this. Incantations for that. And curses to protect them from harm. So it should come as no surprise to find the new exhibit, "Splendors of Ancient Egypt," full of mystery as well. You'll be captivated by the gilded mummy coffins covered with spells, the amulets to ward off evil spirits and the 18-foot-long Book of the Dead. Altogether, over 200 awe-inspiring artifacts have been assembled for this once in a lifetime exhibit. Let it cast its spell over you.</p> <p>(Texas Monthly)</p>
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Figure 1.2 Two magazine advertisements for "Splendors of Ancient Egypt".

that has been created in the advertisements, however, this sounds like a description of an exotic and unusual group of people.

In addition to being shaped by what *is* said, the worlds evoked and created in discourse also are shaped by silence: by what *cannot be* said or *is not* said. One source of silence in the "Splendors" exhibit was the silence of the Egyptian hieroglyphic writing. Egyptian writing appeared on a great many of the artifacts in the show. But there were almost no translations in any of the descriptive placards: the Egyptian writing was treated as decoration rather than as language. What the ancient Egyptians said in the many inscriptions was treated as irrelevant. Another interesting silence was evident in many of the informational wall placards, in phrases like these:

One assumes that...
It is apparent, therefore, that...
His corpulence is to be regarded as...
Such...works of art are termed "models"...

These phrases are not all grammatically the same, but all have in common a missing agent (the doer of the action) or experiencer. Who assumes? To whom is it apparent? Who decides how things are to be regarded? Who makes up or chooses terms for things? The use of expressions like these may have the effect of drawing attention to the fact that there are experts deciding how to explain things to the exhibit's viewers, and that these experts do not need to be identified, presumably because any expert would have come to the same conclusions. The stance taken here is that of someone who is entitled to describe and evaluate things and whose judgments are the correct ones. More generally, making structural choices in which agents or experiencers are left out is one of the many ways people can create a sort of generic opinion (the opinion that "one" holds or that "is apparent") and thereby discourage others from challenging their claims. This sort of discourse tends to obviate the need for individual responsibility for meaning.

1.3.3 Discourse is Shaped by Purpose and Discourse Shapes Possible Purposes

The purposes of the “Splendors” show, and the purposes of the material about it, were several. As a result, many voices could be heard in the texts, voices that sometimes appeared to be in competition. For one thing, the exhibit was intended to be educational. In the American context in which the exhibit took place, certain language-use choices are associated with educators, including imperatives (more powerful people can order less powerful people around in direct ways), expressions of confidence in the evidence one has for one’s claims (educators are often sure they know what they know, or are at least expected to act as if they were), various sorts of simplification, and various ways of speaking for other people that presuppose acknowledged expertise. This set of habits of speech reflects a set of habits of thought, both in educators and in others: educators are thought of as experts (whether or not they always are). As a result, Americans often accept their simplifying material and allow them to be spokespeople for truth.

This discourse of education was evident throughout the “Splendors” exhibit, as the curators spoke on the wall placards and artifact labels. The curators-as-educators told viewers how to think: “These objects, which *we admire* today for their intrinsic beauty...” and described what ordinary people like the viewers might have trouble thinking about: “*It is difficult for a contemporary audience to imagine that...*” They simplified, often by providing modern analogs. For example, mummified ibises (a kind of bird) were described as “‘please’ or ‘thank-you’ offerings,” the clothing on the statue of a man was compared to a beach towel wrapped around his waist, administrative scribes in a granary were described as “ancient CPAs” (Certified Public Accountants), and an Egyptian offering tablet was said to resemble “several halves of bread which have been sliced horizontally down the middle the way a modern prepare[s] bread for a hero sandwich.”

The curators used imperatives to tell museumgoers what to look at: “*Notice* how the laborers carry the grain in sacks and *pay particular attention* to the three figures...” The evidential certainty of educator discourse was created and represented on placards like that describing the Sarcophagus of Kaiemneferet: “the recessed panels recall the niches...*doubtless because...*” and the uncertainty or error of non-educators was contrasted with it in this description of a group of shabtis: “*Contrary to popular opinion*, shabtis were not placed in tombs in order to wait hand and foot on the deceased in the Hereafter.”

But the curators who spoke on the “Splendors” placards also sometimes spoke as archivists. While some artifacts were described with reference to beach towels and sandwiches, other descriptions – and sometimes the same descriptions – included words like *anthropoid*, *polychromatic*, and *physiognomy*. The placard for one jug pointed out “the thick plasticity of its relief decoration.” This is a different voice, one which did not always mesh smoothly with the educator voice. The exhibit information was also characterized by several other clashes of competing purposes which engendered competing discourses. The “Splendors” artifacts were, as mentioned, on loan from a museum in Hildesheim, and curators from Hildesheim helped mount the show. Throughout the exhibit, linguistic choices that sounded German (such as “findspot” in the “Mummy Mask of Paser” example above) competed with ones that sounded English, and sometimes a conflict between German and English ways of talking became evident, as on one

somewhat whiny placard describing works of art that “are termed ‘models’ for lack of a better English word.” Additionally, there was a clash between the discourse of high culture and that of commerce, as the MFAH tried to use this show as a way to make money, setting up a special shop directly outside the exit from the “Splendors” galleries that offered hieroglyph-themed coffee mugs and tote bags, tourist souvenirs from Egypt, made-to-order gold necklaces, and so on.

1.3.4 Discourse is Shaped by the Possibilities and Limitations of Language, and Discourse Shapes Language

Texts and their interpretations are shaped by the structural resources that are available and the structural choices text-builders make. There are conventionalized ways of structuring texts on all levels. Speaking a language, such as English or Korean, means using conventional ways of structuring syllables (a new English word could start with the syllable *pri* but not with *ngi*), conventional ways of structuring words (the *-s* that shows that an English word is plural goes after the stem, not before), conventional ways of structuring sentences (in declarative English sentences, the subject typically precedes the predicate). Likewise, there are conventional ways of structuring longer chunks of discourse, some culturally specific and others resulting from what human cognition is like. They include ways of moving from familiar information to new information, for example, or moving from examples to general claim or from general claim to examples, or moving from question to response.

Striking uses of conventions of structuring can be found throughout the “Splendors of Ancient Egypt” material. For one example, a poster that was stapled into an issue of *MFA Today* a month or two before the exhibit made strategic use of the English possibility of presenting a claim as uncontestable by putting it in an embedded clause: “Thank you for *being a member of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*.” The poster makes rhetorical use of logical presupposition: it sounds as if the copywriter assumes that the reader of the poster is a member of the museum, just as the question “When did *John stop drinking?*” presupposes that John was once a drinker (and could thus be part of an indirect attack on John), or “I’m sorry that *you don’t agree with me*” presupposes that we disagree (and could be used to position you in opposition to me). The poster, worded as it is, is a nice thank-you gift for people who have joined the museum, whose membership includes the magazine subscription. But the poster is also meant to be seen by other people, perhaps people who are not members of the museum and for whom the presupposition that they are will induce guilt and encourage them to join up too.

Just as the structure of sentences is always, to some extent, rhetorically motivated, so is the structure of larger blocks of discourse. The wall placards describing the artifacts in the “Splendors” show had an almost invariable form, as exemplified in this one:

Mummy Mask of Paser

*New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, 1570–1320 B.C.
Cartonnage, which can be compared to papier maché,
painted and gilded, findspot not known*

One assumes that the mummy of Paser, which has not survived to this day, was clad in a cartonnage ensemble, to which this mask belonged. The features are idealizing and are not to be regarded as a likeness, or portrait, of Paser. The mummy, once

Title
[kingdom] [dynasty number in Arabic numeral] [approx. dates] [material] ([treatment of material]) [findspot]
Description

Figure 1.3 Structure of a “Splendors” artifact label.

enveloped in that ensemble, was doubtless placed into Paser’s anthropoid sarcophagus which is on display in this gallery as well. The gilding has a distinctly reddish hue and recalls contemporary ancient Egyptian texts from the New Kingdom which mention “the gold which bled.” It is apparent, therefore, that the ancient Egyptians recognized this property of their gold and appreciated it.

(Informational wall placard)

The structure of this placard is like that of all the other placards in the show, as well as the structure of wall placards in other museum shows. One way to represent this structure is shown in Figure 1.3.

This sort of artifact label probably seems natural to those of us who have seen it many times before – right down to some rather German-sounding elements in the prose. (*Findspot* sounds like a German word, for example, because it is formed out of two Germanic roots using the Germanic strategy of compounding nouns to form new words.) But note how the structure foregrounds some elements of the description and backgrounds others. The first thing, in large type, is a label, not in Egyptian but in English, and not in Egyptian hieroglyphic writing but in Roman letters. This label removes the object from its original context and puts it into a Western frame of reference. (It could be said that the label mimes the action of the archaeologist, the collector, or the grave-robber in this respect.) In the Western cultural context, naming something can be seen as a way of establishing dominion over it, as is represented in the Old Testament story in which God grants human beings control over other species by giving Adam the ability to name things. More generally, naming is like the glossing (interpreting words) and parsing (interpreting grammatical structures) that translators do. It requires fitting things from some other realm into the system of terms and ideas that goes with one’s own language. And, like naming, “glossing is clearly a political process. How often do two languages meet as equals, with equal and reciprocal authority?” (Becker, 1995: 232). Note also the order in which facts about the artifact are presented on the wall placard, and what these facts are. History (kingdom, dynasty number, approximate dates) precedes craftsmanship (material, treatment). Place comes last: the Egyptian artifacts were taken out of their spatial context in their descriptions just as they are in Hildesheim (where they are usually on display) or Houston.

1.3.5 Discourse is Shaped by Interpersonal Relations Among Participants, and Discourse Helps to Shape Interpersonal Relations

The interpersonal relations connected with discourse include the relations among the speakers and writers, audiences, and overhearers who are represented in texts, as well as the relations among speakers and writers, audiences, and overhearers who are

involved in producing and interpreting texts. For example, the explanatory material about Houston's "Splendors of Ancient Egypt" gives evidence of several, sometimes conflicting visions of the relationships between museum staff and museum patrons. Sometimes the intended audience is clearly youthful, as in the *MFA Today* magazine's "Kaleidoscope for Kids" section, where Egyptian shabtis were depicted and explained in an article that appeared while the "Splendors" exhibit was on display:

SHABTIS

These small blue figures are called shabtis (pronounced shabtees). They are made of faience, a type of glazed pottery. Shabtis were believed to help people who died. They were placed in tombs to be servants in the afterlife, working for the dead. Hundreds of shabtis have been found in kings' tombs. These shabtis are holding hoes used by farmers for digging. They are standing like wrapped mummies, ready to work in the afterlife.

(*MFA Magazine, "Kaleidoscope for Kids"*)

This is not children's language, but language by adults addressed to children. It represents, in other words, an adult's idea of how a child's mind might work. There is something jumpy about the paragraph; a reader has to work a bit to decide how each sentence is related to the previous one. This is in part because there are no explicit links between sentences. There are no conjunctions like *thus* or *so*, which might have clarified the causal relationship between "Shabtis were believed to help people who died" and "They were placed in tombs..." Adding a conjunction might also have helped with the unclear reference of the pronoun *they* in "They were placed in tombs..." Are *they* the "people who died" or the shabtis? It is not immediately clear. Using *and* might have helped smooth the flow and connect the events that are being represented in "These shabtis are holding hoes used by farmers for digging. They are standing..." The primary sentence-linking (or "cohesive") device is instead the repeated sentence subject: *these small blue figures, they, shabtis, they, hundreds of shabtis, these shabtis, they*. Using repetition rather than conjunctions to create cohesion is a feature of the speech of children themselves (Bennett-Kastor, 1994) and a feature of adults' "baby talk" to small children (Snow and Ferguson, 1977). We might wonder, however, about its usefulness in a text addressed to readers who are old enough to interpret conventional phonetic spellings such as "shabtees" (which may not actually reveal any more about how the word is to be pronounced than "shabtis" does) and who are able to understand (and need to know) what faience is. How old is this audience of imagined children? We could say that the text is designed for its readers, and that was no doubt the writer's explicit aim, but we could also say that it designs its readers, putting them in their place by talking to them the way older people talk to babies. (We might also note that this text contradicts the text on the wall placard for the shabtis, which notes that shabtis were *not* "believed to help people who died.")

1.3.6 Discourse is Shaped by Expectations Created by Familiar Discourse, and New Instances of Discourse Help to Shape Our Expectations About What Future Discourse Will Be Like and How It Should Be Interpreted

"Intertextual" relations between texts and other texts enable people to interpret new instances of discourse with reference to familiar activities and familiar categories of style and form. The uses of discourse are as varied as human cultures are. For example,

one important ceremonial genre for the Kuna of Panama is talk by a healer to small stick dolls, which none of the human participants except the healer understands or is even meant to understand (Sherzer, 1983), and one way of speaking in Tzeltal (a language of indigenous Mexicans) is called *lučul k'op*, which means “talk carried out while sitting on a tree branch” (Stross, 1974). But often-repeated activities involving discourse give rise to relatively fixed ways of proceeding with the activities, and these ways of proceeding often include relatively fixed, routinized ways of talking and types of texts. For example, when the ads for the “Splendors” exhibit mention “The Book of the Dead,” they call to mind expectations about books – what they look like, what they are about, what they are for, how they are produced and distributed and so on – that readers have formed in their own, Western contexts. Mentioning Egyptian “spells” calls to mind expectations about magical incantations, such as the expectation that spells contain Arabic-sounding “magic words” such as “shazzam” or “abracadabra.” (This expectation could not, in fact, correspond to what Egyptian spells were like, since the ancient Egyptians were not Arabs and did not speak Arabic.) In these cases, the expectations created by intertextuality may predispose museumgoers to form inaccurate images of Egyptian “books” and “spells.”

But intertextuality is crucial for communicative successes, too. The fact that the show’s wall placards are in a familiar format makes them relatively easy to read, for example. Museumgoers do not have to spend time and energy figuring out what kind of texts the placards are, what to expect them to contain, or how they are meant to be used.

1.3.7 Discourse is Shaped by the Limitations and Possibilities of Its Media, and the Possibilities of Communications Media are Shaped by Their Uses in Discourse

Strategic mixing of media is evident everywhere in the material about “The Splendors of Ancient Egypt.” The magazine ads, for example, have a more spoken-like quality than do the magazine articles. Punctuation is used to represent the rhythm of speech, as in “They had spells for this. Incantations for that. And curses to protect them from harm.” In all the materials, visual imagery is prevalent and often repeated. It is not the history of Egypt that is on display and for sale, nor a set of lessons about culture or religion or mortuary practices, but a feast for the eyes. (The MFAH is, after all, an art museum; curators designing a display for a history museum might have done things differently.) This is especially clear in popular Egyptology’s enthusiastic adoption of the Egyptian practice of using Egyptian writing as decoration. For the people who designed these texts and the audience they envision, the birds, cups, sphynx-like figures, human arms and legs, and abstract shapes that make up the hieroglyphic writing system are like figures in wallpaper borders. They are to be admired because they are unusual or delicate or colorful, not because they are meaningful. At the “Splendors of Ancient Egypt” gift shop, hieroglyph-themed gift-wrapping paper and gold jewelry were for sale. For those who could not afford the popular “cartouche” jewelry, on which the buyer’s name was supposedly spelled out in hieroglyphic characters, a “cartouche computer” could produce a paper one, on a background of hieroglyphic decoration. (On these cartouches, names were spelled phonetically, as if the hieroglyphic writing system were an alphabet, with each character corresponding to a single language sound. In fact, the Egyptian hieroglyphic system did not work this way. This use of it suggests the Eurocentric attitude that the default writing system is an alphabet.) Decorative hieroglyphs were

used in other ways, too. For example, the designers of a flyer circulated to museum members advertising the 1997 Houston BMW Group Fine Arts 5K footrace (an event with no connection whatsoever to ancient Egypt, except that runners' entry fees benefited the museum) used hieroglyphs as a decorative background for the heading and to fill in some unused space on the entry form. In all these uses of Egyptian writing, expectations associated with pictorial media (including expectations about visual harmony, beauty, and so on) were meant to override expectations associated with writing, such as the expectation that the symbols would be meaningful and that a reader would need to consider their meanings as a set rather than one by one.

Discussion

- 1.3 Does the shabtis paragraph above remind you of other things addressed to children? Does it sound like a textbook? In what ways? On which other models do you think the authors of the “Kaleidoscope for Kids” page might have drawn?
- 1.4 Find a magazine advertisement (print or online) that violates your expectations about what you will see in a magazine advertisement, and use that as the basis for discussing what magazine advertisements are usually like. Does the language of the “Splendors” advertisements reproduced above violate or play with your generic expectations for magazine advertisements in any way? If so, how? How have magazine advertisements changed since 1996, when these were published? How do they differ from country to country, from language to language?
- 1.5 In what ways, and why, would you expect a website about the “Splendors” exhibit to differ from the print-based modes of presentation we have been examining?
- 1.6 If online social media had been available at the time, the museum would no doubt have used Facebook and Twitter to publicize the “Splendors” exhibit. Write a 140-character tweet advertising the exhibit and compare and contrast it with the magazine advertisements discussed above. What could a Facebook page about the exhibit do that a magazine advertisement could not do? What other online media could a museum use, and how?
- 1.7 Look again at these examples from the “Splendors” exhibit of sentences with missing agents or experiencers.

One assumes that...

It is apparent, therefore, that...

His corpulence is to be regarded as...

Such...works of art are termed “models”...

In what other types of discourse do you find sentences like these? Why?

1.4 Data for Discourse Analysis

The material with which discourse analysts work consists of actual instances of discourse. With the exception of some scholarship in pragmatics, there is very little work in discourse analysis that relies entirely on non-empirical speculation about what discourse is like. Some “instances of discourse” seem easy to identify and collect. It

would appear to make intuitive sense, for example, to treat a tweet, a magazine article, or a movie as a single, self-contained unit. Perhaps the prototypical text, in traditional literary and philological scholarship, is a book. A book is a physical object which stays the same (except for wear and tear) over time. Its beginning and ending are unmistakable: the front cover and the back cover. It is written.

But many discourse analysts work with instances of discourse that do not have all – or any – of these characteristics. For one thing, many written texts, such as webpages, blogs, and wikis, are more fluid than printed discourse once was, co-created by many people, changing from minute to minute, and appearing differently on different computer screens. Furthermore, a great deal of discourse analysis is about non-written discourse. Since we cannot analyze discourse in these modes in real time, as it is taking place – analysis requires much more time and distance than a single viewing or listening provides – we study *records* of discourse. For online written discourse, these records may be in the form of chat logs or screenshots. For oral discourse, they are often in the form of transcripts of audio- or video-recordings. By capturing changing written texts at a particular time or recording and transcribing non-written discourse, we give them some of the characteristics of books and other more prototypical texts: we make them into physical objects; we fix their structure; we convert them into writing, in the case of oral discourse; we give them boundaries. Texts of these kinds do not exist independently of discourse analysts' choices about how to "entextualize": how to select and delimit chunks out of the flow of talk or writing, make these chunks into texts, and treat them analytically in much the way we have traditionally treated written texts.

Every choice about what to count as a text for analysis is a choice not only about what to include but also about what to exclude. Such choices about what and how much to treat as a complete unit and where to draw its boundaries have important ramifications for the conclusions we draw. A text, in other words, might be one discussion or a whole series of television debates; a single Facebook post or the whole interaction it gives rise to in the form of likes, comments, and replies; one conversation or all the talk that constitutes a relationship. A meeting might be defined as starting once everyone is seated and the session has been called to order (and this might be a convenient way to define it, since it is much easier to record people when they are stationary than when they are on the move), but defining it this way would exclude the talk that occurred beforehand, and this talk could be vital to what goes on in the meeting. For that matter, even written texts of the most prototypical sort are the result of decisions about entextualization based on culture-specific expectations. A book is a complete text only if it is treated as relatively independent of other texts, independent of the rest of the author's oeuvre, for example, or independent of the ideas about what is natural and right that were circulating at the time the book was written. In order to be treated as a text, a website or a blog must be sampled at one or more discrete times – but one of the features of these forms of discourse that makes them different from other forms of writing is precisely that they change much faster and more continuously, so treating them as if they were analogous to writing on paper may obscure one of the things that is most interesting about how online discourse works.

Any analytical move that involves drawing boundaries, pulling out chunks from the flow of experience and treating them as wholes, is somewhat artificial. Nonetheless, such moves are the essential first step of any discourse analysis or any other approach to humanistic or social scientific research. The roots of discourse analysis are in the analysis of traditional texts – in classical philology, literary criticism, and hermeneutics – and the

controlling metaphor behind this approach to research, explicit or not, has often been that analyzing human life is a matter of open-ended interpretation rather than fact-finding, more like reading than like identifying data points that bear on pre-formed hypotheses (Geertz, 1973). So it is especially important for us to be aware of the ways in which we may be tempted to treat all discourse as if it were like the writing in a book. It is crucial to be able to uncover the many ways in which texts are shaped by contexts and the many ways in which texts shape contexts. It is partly for this reason that this book is organized around the heuristic introduced above. A heuristic such as this is a good way to ensure that discourse analysis is systematic in its attempt to take multiple perspectives on texts, and thinking about analysis this way keeps reminding us that there are always many right answers to any question we ask about humans and language.

How many texts are enough? Discourse analysis often starts with a relatively small amount of data. Many discourse analysts use this data to make qualitative claims. In other words, the claims they make on the basis of their analyses are not about how often something occurs in a language, in a genre, or in interaction in general, but about why or how it occurs in the data at hand, and any suggestions they make about the likelihood that the same thing will occur in other data are simply suggestions. The next step in such a project might be to ask the same questions of another body of data, to explore whether things work the same way there. Alternatively, the next step might be to focus in on a particular aspect of the findings of the qualitative analysis, one that can be defined in such a way as to be identified mechanically, and use a larger amount of data to make quantitative claims about it. Research on language that uses computer power to find patterns in large corpora (Latin for “bodies”) of discourse data is called “corpus linguistics.” Corpus analysis can reconfirm qualitative work, making it harder for people who feel that “truth is in numbers” to ignore, but quantitative corpus analysis can also uncover things that qualitative analysis cannot.

To compare qualitative and quantitative analyses of the same topic, let us look at two studies of language used to talk about aging. Coupland, Coupland, and Giles (1991) used detailed, multifaceted, qualitative analyses of conversations between older and younger adults to show that aging is not just a matter of getting older, wiser, or feebler, but is instead in part created in discourse, as people use some terms and not others to describe themselves and their interlocutors, talk about their lives and their abilities in some ways and not others, and so on. Starting from the observation made in such qualitative research that, in some conversations, words like *old* and *elderly* do not just refer to people’s chronological age, but carry negative connotations as well, Mautner (2007) explored whether the term “elderly” has such connotations in English discourse more generally, and, if so, what the term suggests. To do this, Mautner used an electronic collection of 57 million words of written text in English, including British, American, and Australian newspapers, books, flyers, catalogues, unscripted speech, and radio broadcasts. Each word in this corpus was labeled with its part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, and so on), so, using concordance software, Mautner was able to search for cases where *elderly* was part of a string of adjectives, or where it occurred together with the noun *people* and a verb. Whereas qualitative research like that of Coupland *et al.* justifies the qualitative claim that the meanings of words like *elderly* can be loaded, because people use such words to construct social identities in interaction, corpus-based, quantitative research like Mautner’s justifies a different kind of claim, one about what *elderly* means in English.

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches all have their place in discourse analysis. Researchers who choose to work with large, electronic corpora of discourse need to make sure that their work is grounded in thorough qualitative analysis, though, so that choices about what to code and count, and how to do so, are well motivated. Researchers who do qualitative work with smaller numbers of texts need to be careful not to make unjustified generalizations about their findings.

1.4.1 Transcription: Representing Speech in Writing

Many examples throughout this book are taken from other scholars' work. In these examples, I have kept the original authors' transcription conventions, so that the examples appear exactly (or as nearly as possible) as they appeared in the articles and books from which they are taken. (In cases in which the meanings of special symbols and unconventional uses of punctuation, layout, capitalization, and so on are not obvious, I have explained them.)

Readers will thus quickly notice that there are almost as many ways to transcribe speech as there are researchers who do so. Although somewhat standardized transcription systems are used in some endeavors that involve discourse analysis (such as Conversation Analysis), there is no single, generally accepted way to represent speech on the page. This sometimes surprises newcomers to discourse analysis, until they realize that any way of representing speech in writing is necessarily selective, and that different selections highlight (and disguise) different aspects of what speech is like. A transcript is, by necessity, a partial representation of talk, and transcribers' decisions about what to include and what to omit have practical and theoretical consequences (Ochs, 1979a; Bucholtz, 2000). For example, a transcription system that highlights interruption and simultaneous talk makes it relatively easy to think of conversation as collaborative, whereas a play-script transcript makes it look more as if each speaker had an independent conversational agenda. Practically speaking, highly detailed transcripts are often hard to read, whereas easy-to-read transcripts include less specific information. No transcription system could possibly be ideal for all purposes.

This is not to say that all systems are equally good: if the idea, for example, is (as it usually is) to include all the words that were spoken, a transcription in which a spell-checker has deleted repeated words will be inadequate. A transcription needs to be accurate in the sense that it includes what it claims to include. But it cannot include everything, and the most useful transcriptions in discourse analysis research are those which highlight what the researcher is interested in and do not include too much distracting extraneous detail. Very detailed transcripts may, in fact, include more information than people are able to process, and this may lead to high rates of error when such transcripts are reproduced (O'Connell and Kowal, 2000). Readers should compare and contrast the systems used in the examples as they go through the book, as a basis for deciding what sort of system they need for their own work.

Transcriptions of speech are representations of speakers as well as being representations of speech. The most literal way to represent a speaker's speech may not be the most desirable way to represent the speaker. For example, casual English, as spoken by almost anyone, is characterized by the pronunciation of "ing" as "in" ([ɪn] in the International Phonetic Alphabet) or "uhn" ([ən]), and English speakers almost invariably "drop" certain consonants in consonant clusters. When the letter "s" appears at the

end of an English word, it often represents the sound [z]. When they are not stressed, English vowels often sound like “uh” ([ə]). So an accurate way to represent the sound of “I was cleaning out my desk,” as casually spoken, might be something like this: “I wuhz cleanin’ out muh des.” Notice, though, how the choice to represent sound accurately may have the effect of representing the speaker as stupid, uneducated, rural, or lower class. In general, realistic detail in the representation of speech in a transcription often comes at the expense of accuracy and fairness in how the speaker is represented, so some discourse analysts think it wise not to include any more detail about the sound of speech than is necessary to illustrate one’s point. Others think fine detail is crucial because it encourages analysts not to take anything for granted about what particular utterances actually sounded like.

Discussion

1.8 Here are several written representations of oral discourse from discourse analysts’ research. For each, discuss what is added and what is lost in transforming talk into writing and deciding where to begin and end.

a) Transcript of a narrative in a face-to-face conversation – BJ talking to JG about gentrification. Double parentheses indicate paralinguistic details. What might have been the transcriber’s reason for including all the repetitions and hesitation noises (for example, *uhh, but he, he ...*)? What do you think of the use of non-standard spelling in parts of the transcript?

- 1 JG: Yeah you’ll get that attitude, a friend of mine moved to, bought a house in McKees Rocks because it was only fifteen thousand dollars.
- 2 BJ: Mmm hmm, yeah.
- 3 JG: Uhh, but he, he goes to the community meetings every week now, he’s really active and that makes him one of very few people in McKees Rocks that’s active. But he said, uh, when when when uh, the artist from the Community Mural Project was there, uhm, this was, months ago, now it’s done but, before that, ((swallows)) she had uh come eh to the, with the, to the mayor and the council there and said “What, needs to be done to heal this town?” You know which was
- 4 BJ: “Heal this town!” ((sarcastically))
- 5 JG: you know, that’s how, right. Right, right you and I laugh. Uhh but eh, but at the same time, the mayor immediately responds “There ain’t nothin’ wrong wid’ dis town!” ((lower, creakier, gruffer-sounding voice))
- 6 BJ: ((laughs))
- 7 JG: And ((laughing)) you know and so there’s, you know I guess there’s that there’s that tension there.

(Johnstone, 2013, 210–11)

b) Transcript (made according to somewhat different transcription conventions) of a telephone conversation between an emergency dispatcher (CT) and a caller (C). In the transcription system used in this example, equals signs indicate “latched” utterances, or utterances spoken one after the other without a pause; colons signal stretched-out sounds, as in “gu:ys”; a single period in

parentheses signals a slight pause; words inside parentheses are guesses made on the basis of hard-to-decipher parts of the recording. What is added and what is lost through the use of non-standard, semi-phonetic spelling?

- 1 CT: Mid-city emergency
- 2 C: Yes sir uh go' uh couple gu:ys over here ma:n
- 3 they thin' they bunch uh wi:se ((*background*
- 4 *noise*))=
- 5 CT: =Are they in your house? or is this uh business?
- 6 C: They're over here ah Quick Stop (.) They (fuckin) come over here
- 7 an pulled up at thuh Quick Stop slammin' their doors intuh my
- 8 truck.
- 9 CT: Quick Stop?=-
- 10 C: =Yeah.
- 11 CT: Okay Uh- were you uh customer at that store?
- 12 C: Yeah.
- 13 CT: What thee address there or thee uhm:...

(Zimmerman, 1998: 100–1)

- c) From a transcript of the beginning of a school class. Mr. J. is the teacher; the other speakers are secondary-school students. Here, arrows indicate rising intonation on the preceding syllable. Numbers in parentheses are seconds of silence; a dot in parentheses indicates a silence shorter than a second. Double slashes indicate simultaneous talk, and capital letters indicate particularly strong stress. What is the effect of the lack of standard sentence-initial capital letters and sentence-final punctuation? Why do you imagine the transcriber chose to highlight syllables that sounded emphasized?

- 1 Mr. J.: um (2) okay toDAY's lesson
there you go↑
((places statement on screen: "How men and women are portrayed
in advertising"))
you can get started on that..
and w- (.) and then this is what we're doing
Critical examination↑ of sexuality and gender in advertising
- 2 Olivia: ((reading aloud)) how men and women are portrayed differently in
advertising
- 3 Luanna: isn't it the eighteenth today↑
- 4 Mr. J.: (1) and (1) how do we reinforce our stereotyp- how does THAT
reinforce our stereotypes↑
- 5 Aroha: this is ahhh
//Whenever I get a pen//it always runs OUT
- 6 Luana: //mister isn't it the eighteenth today↑//

(King, 2014: 69)

- d) Here are excerpts from two transcripts that include English translations. What are the effects, if any, of the transcribers' choices about where to place the translation with respect to the actual speech?

- i) Danish–English transcript. Here, an interviewer (And) is talking to a boy identified as Isam (Isa) about what kinds of Danish he speaks. The part in boldface type is “a stylized performance illustrating significant traits of street language” (Madsen, 2013: 29).

1 And: men (.) hvordan taler du i	1 And: but (.) how do you speak
2 skolen	2 in school
3 Isa: integreret	3 Isa: integrated
4 And: mm hvad vil det sige	4 And: mm what does that mean
5 Isa: altså jeg taler (.) fint med	5 Isa: well I speak (.) fine with
6 min lærer og lærerne	6 my teacher and the teachers
7 And: mm (0.3)	7 And: mm (0.3)
8 And: hvad så: I frikvartererne	8 And: so what during recess do you
9 taler du også integreret der	9 also speak integrated then
10 Isa: nej (.) der t'aler jeg sgu	10 Isa: no (.) then I speak bloody
11 gadesprog ↑ma:n	11 street language ↑ma:n
12 And: t'aler du gadesprog hhh	12 And: you speak street language hhh
13 Isa: heh heh hhh ((laughs))	13 Isa: heh heh hhh ((laughs))

(Madsen, 2013: 128–9)

- ii) Spanish–English transcript. Here, a boy, J., is interpreting for his mother, Sra. F, what the boy’s teacher has just said (in English) during a parent–teacher conference at J’s school. Sra. F. does not understand English.

J:	Esta, a veces cuando uhm haciendo lo trabajos así como de spelling entiendo las primeras páginas pero la última no, digo que no le entiendo, y este no la hago. <i>[Uhm, sometimes when uhm doing work, like spelling, I understand the first pages but not the last one, I mean I don't understand, and I don't do it.]</i>
Sra. F:	Pero no la entiendes, no la haces, no la entiendes en realidad o no la haces? <i>[But (is it that) you don't understand, (and) you don't do it, you really don't understand it or you (just) don't do it?]</i>
J:	No la entiendo. <i>[I don't understand.]</i>
Sra. F:	La última no más? La última? <i>[Just the last one? The last one?]</i>
J:	Uh-huh.
Sra F:	Y por qué unas sí, las primeras, y no las últimas? <i>[And why (do you understand) some, the first ones, and not the last ones?]</i>
J:	porque están difíciles <i>[Because they're hard.]</i>

(Reynolds et al., 2015: 99)

- 1.9 Compare and contrast the transcriptions in Discussion Question 1.8 with these other ways of representing speech in writing. Which seem more “realistic” and why?

- a) From a newspaper report. Note that speech is not only “reported” here but described indirectly, via “metalinguistic” verbs (that is, verbs that refer to linguistic actions) such as *say, insist, react, accuse, complain, and ask*.

Aboriginals must integrate, says Lib MP

THE “dysfunctional” Aboriginal community of Palm Island should be abandoned and its residents moved to the mainland unless they integrate into mainstream society, a federal Liberal MP has insisted.

Backbencher Peter Lindsay, whose north Queensland seat of Herbert includes the troubled island community, said that if Aboriginal people on Palm Island could not buy homes and generate jobs then “it would be better to move them back on to the mainland and integrate them that way”.

Mr Lindsay said the same rule should be applied to remote Cape York communities such as Mornington Island, Lockhart River and Aurukun.

Local Aboriginal leaders reacted furiously, accusing Mr Lindsay and the federal Government of neglecting the island.

“He hasn’t got a clue what he’s talking about,” Palm Island Deputy Mayor Zac Sam said. “The Government is always complaining to us about not doing anything. We have been asking about funding that is supposed to help us set up enterprise... but nothing has happened.”

But Mr Lindsay said the Government was more than generous. “The fundamental issue that troubles me is that Palm Island is a hopeless dysfunctional community with almost no employment and no prospects of employment,” the MP said.

(Gerard, 2006)

- b) From a play script.

SCENE: An island off the West of Ireland.

(*Cottage kitchen, with nets, oil-skins, spinning wheel, some new boards standing by the wall, etc. Cathleen, a girl of about twenty, finishes kneading cake and puts it down in the pot-oven by the fire; then wipes her hands and begins to spin at the wheel. Nora, a young girl, puts her head in at the door.*)

NOR: (*in a low voice*). Where is she?

CATHLEEN: She’s lying down, God help her, and may be sleeping, if she’s able.

CATHLEEN: (*Nora comes in softly, and takes a bundle from under her shawl.*) (*spinning the wheel rapidly*). What is it you have?

NORA: The young priest is after bringing them. It’s a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal. (*Cathleen stops her wheel with a sudden movement, and leans out to listen.*)

NORA: We’re to find out if it’s Michael’s they are, some time herself will be down looking by the sea.

CATHLEEN: How would they be Michael’s, Nora. How would he go the length of that way to the far north?

NORA: The young priest says he’s known the like of it. “If it’s Michael’s they are,” says he, “you can tell herself he’s got a clean burial by the grace of God, and if they’re not his, let no one say a word about them, for she’ll be getting her death,” says he, “with crying and lamenting.”

(Synge, 1935: 83, *Riders to the Sea*, scene 1)

1.4.2 “Descriptive” and “Critical” Goals

No matter what the overarching research question, all discourse analysis results in description: describing texts and how they work is always a goal along the way. In some discourse analysts’ work, descriptions of texts are used in answering questions that arise in the service of “descriptive” or “documentary” research, particularly in linguistics. Work of this kind is based in the idea that the primary goal of scholarly research is to describe the world, or whatever bit of the world the researcher is interested in. (In linguistics, the prototypical project of this kind is the description of a language, resulting in the production of a grammar and a dictionary.) To aim to do purely descriptive work presupposes two beliefs: (1) that it is possible to describe the world – in other words, that there is not an infinite number of possible descriptions, any one of which would be valid in some situation, and (2) that the proper role of a scholar is to describe the status quo first, and only later, if at all, to apply scholarly findings in the solution of practical problems.

Some of the foundational work in discourse analysis took place in the context of descriptive linguistics. This includes, for example, work by Pike (1967), Grimes (1975), and other American linguists who attempted to describe the rules that determine the structure of texts in a variety of languages, as well as scholarship in the context of systemic-functional linguistics such as that of Halliday and Hasan (1976) on what makes English texts cohesive. Work such as this about discourse structure is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. At the risk of some oversimplification, we can say that work in this tradition did not call into question either of the two beliefs underlying descriptive research. Important early work by anthropologists (Hymes, 1972; Gumperz, 1982a) and sociologists (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974) bearing on the nature of social interaction and the kinds of context that influence text did not overtly problematize the two beliefs, either. We also discuss these scholars’ work later on. A great deal of work involving discourse analysis continues to be based on the belief that pure description is possible and desirable. This is not to say that many descriptive linguists do not also have important practical goals for how they want to apply their findings in the world. For example, the descriptive work of Pike and Grimes was aimed, ultimately, at translating the Christian Bible into previously unwritten languages, and much of Gumperz’s research took place in the context of problem-solving work about intercultural communication.

Both of the beliefs that underlie pure descriptivism have, however, been called into question more and more urgently during the past several decades, under the influence of philosophical relativism and critical social theories such as Marxism. Relativism is the idea that different people live in different worlds, whether because they have different minds, different shared systems of beliefs and norms (this is “cultural relativism”) or different languages (“linguistic relativism”). The three versions, all of which have been current in social and linguistic thought, have somewhat different implications for what it is thought possible to describe. A linguistic relativist such as B. L. Whorf (1941), could, for example, claim to describe the worldview of the Hopi as a group, whereas a philosopher for whom relativity was based in different minds would not be able to describe any more than one individual’s world. Any version of relativism, however, leads to skepticism about the possibility of “scientific truth” and encourages researchers to take a critical, self-conscious (or “reflexive”) stance vis-à-vis their own work and the claims they make. Critical social theory describes the human world not as a system in, or tending to, equilibrium, but as a system characterized by dominance, exploitation, struggle, oppression, and power. People whose grounding is in theory of this sort attempt to show what is

wrong with the status quo. They tend to be interested in the dominated groups rather than in those who dominate them; their research about struggles over power is (at least in principle) meant to help empower the relatively powerless.

Discourse analysis has increasingly (though by no means exclusively) come to be used in the service of critical goals. This is to say that many researchers throughout the humanities and social sciences have come to be (1) critical of the possibility of producing a single, coherent, scientifically valid description, and (2) critical of the social status quo and concerned to have their work used in changing things for the better. Two groups of researchers who are particularly identified with this way of thinking (in part because they have been successful in appropriating and arguing for the use of the term “critical”) have called their ways of working “Critical Linguistics,” or CL (Fowler *et al.*, 1979; Hodge and Kress, 1993) or, more commonly “Critical Discourse Analysis,” or CDA (Fairclough, 1992, 2003; van Dijk 1993a; Wodak 1996). We discuss their work in detail in Chapter 2. It should be stressed, however, that there is far more research using discourse analysis that is critical in this sense than just the work explicitly associated with these two schools. Critical approaches to texts have a long tradition in American anthropology and linguistics (Adams, 1999), and these approaches have had considerable influence. More generally, discourse analysis is, at root, a highly systematic, thorough approach to critical reading (and listening), and critical reading almost inevitably leads to questioning the status quo and often leads to questions about power and inequality. In other words, sensitive discourse analysts should always be casting critical eyes on their own process of analysis and on the situation they study, whether or not methodological or social critique is the end goal.

Discussion

- 1.10** The words “critical” and “criticism” are used in several ways. “Criticism” can be evaluative. It can mean negative commentary (as in “She is too critical of her children”), or it can mean evaluative commentary whether negative or positive (like much literature, film, music, or theater criticism). “Criticism” can also be non-evaluative (at least in theory): “critical thinking” is careful, systematic, self-conscious thinking, without any necessary evaluative goals, and the goal of academic literary criticism is not always overtly evaluative, either. Would you say it is just a historical accident that the same set of words should be used to refer to description and evaluation, or is there a necessary connection between description and evaluation? Is it possible to describe without evaluating?
- 1.11** What are your goals as a discourse analyst? How do you imagine being able to use discourse analysis to help answer the questions you are asking? Are your goals descriptive, critical, or both?

1.5 Locations of Meaning

Our discussions throughout this book raise several important general issues about language and discourse. One of these has to do with where the meaning of a text is located. Let us consider four possibilities:

- 1) The meaning of a text is what the speaker means.
- 2) The meaning of a text is what the text itself means.

- 3) The meaning of a text is its meaning to its audiences.
- 4) The meaning of a text is in all these places.

One way of talking about what a text means is to talk about what its producer meant by it. In everyday talk about meaning, Americans often appeal to this sense of where meaning is located, in the speaker's intentions, and the approaches to discourse surveyed in Chapter 3 focus on the connections between speakers' intentions and strategic choices and the meanings of the things they say. When misunderstandings arise, speakers often say, "That's not what I meant!" or "You didn't understand me," making the implicit claim that what the speaker intends to mean is the true meaning of an utterance. To repair misunderstandings, speakers rephrase what they said. In literary studies, the idea that the meaning of a text is what the author meant is reflected in critical approaches that involve biographical work about authors in attempts to uncover what the author might have meant. When we wonder about speaker-meaning, we ask, in the past tense, "What did you/he/she mean by that?"

Another influential approach to meaning in literary studies, called the "New Criticism," was based on the idea that the meaning of a text is in the text. The New Critics' idea was that the way to understand a text is to avoid the "intentional fallacy" involved in the attempt to determine what the author might have had in mind, focusing instead on extremely detailed, rigorous reading of the text. In discourse studies, conversation analysts take a similar methodological approach. This sense of the location of meaning also circulates in everyday life, as when we tell a student who we think has not understood a passage to read it again, or when we look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary. We appeal to text-meaning when we ask a third party, not part of the interaction, to tell us what an utterance or a text means. When we query meaning from this perspective, we ask, in the present tense "What does this mean?"

A third place to look for meaning is in audiences. Meaning in this sense is meaning to someone. In everyday interaction, we appeal to this locus of meaning when we say "What I got out of that movie was..." or when we say "I'm confused" instead of "You're unclear." Various popular approaches to therapeutic intervention in misunderstanding make use of the technique of eliciting what utterances mean to the people who hear them, asking people to tell each other about how each interprets what the other says. Phrases that remind people to do this include "What I'm hearing you say is..." The potential difference between meaning by a speaker and meaning to a hearer is a frequent source of humor, as in a cartoon in which the boyfriend says, over the phone, "The office is crazy today," whereupon the girlfriend thinks "Our movie date is off..." He says "I might have to stay a few minutes late" and she thinks "Dinner is canceled," and so on. The extreme version of the audience-oriented view of meaning would be that a text could mean anything at all, depending on who was reading or hearing it – a view which gives rise to skepticism about the possibility of talking about meaning at all.

An influential view of meaning among students of discourse in linguistics, rhetoric, and anthropology locates meaning in the abstract space between hearers, speakers, and texts, saying that meaning is "socially constructed," or "jointly produced." This view of meaning underlies attempts to understand communication that are based on "negotiated meaning" (Flower, 1994) and explorations of "the audience as co-author" (Duranti and Brenneis, 1986), attempts that focus on the evidence, in interactions, that people are adapting to and influencing each other's interpretations. In this view, too,

texts have no “true meanings”; meaning is indeterminate, since different social actors, with different minds, come to different conclusions.

People’s senses of how language works – their language ideologies – often encourage them to look for meaning in one place rather than another. In the dominant Western tradition, as we have noted, authors and texts are often thought of as the most authoritative sources of meaning, and the idea that meaning is the result of interpretation by audiences has sometimes seemed threatening. In debates about the law that are based on disputes about the meaning of texts such as the US Constitution, each side accuses the other of being untrue to the authors’ intentions, of not reading the words of the text carefully enough, or of indulging in excesses of creative interpretation. Religious debates are often debates about the location of meaning: is the true meaning of the foundational scriptures to be found in the scriptures themselves, or is it also important to consider how God, or the writers of the scriptures, would intend people to read them, or how earlier theologians have interpreted them?

Discourse analysts should consider meaning from all of these perspectives, and the approach to discourse analysis taken in this book tries to encourage that via systematic attention to audiences and speakers as well as to texts. But discourse analysts do not work with interactions. We work – as we must, and as all other students of human interaction must – with *records* of interactions, which we experience as repeatable, re-readable, re-watchable, analyzable texts. This fact sometimes encourages us to privilege texts over speakers or hearers as definitive sources of meaning. We need to be careful to do what we can to minimize the problem.

1.6 Discourse as Strategy; Discourse as Adaptation

The development of discourse analysis is historically linked to the study of the strategic aspects of discourse. In the context of the first European democracy, in classical Greece, those people who had the rights of citizens (at that time actually a fairly small subset of the population) needed to be able to make their own cases in courts of law, and the systematic study of speech-making and persuasion arose originally as the underpinning of practical education in oratory. The earliest Western analyses of discourse were those underlying the methods of the Greek sophists, who taught people how to make effective speeches, and the theoretical discussions of rhetoric by Aristotle (in the *Rhetoric*), Plato (in the dialogue “Phaedrus” and elsewhere) and their successors (Kennedy, 1980). The study of the larger-scale choices involved in the design of discourse (choices about topic development, organization, style, and delivery) were the subject matter of education in rhetoric which has been part of the Western educational tradition, in one form or another, for its entire history.

The study of smaller-scale resources for discourse (sentence-level grammar, the meanings of words, the sounds of words and phrases, prosody) has always been connected in the Western educational tradition with the study of literature, so that it, too, has always focused attention on highly planned, edited discourse. The fact that popular ideas about discourse tend to stress its purposive, crafted, facet is a result of the fact that the various traditions of rhetoric and poetics have, for centuries, had an enormous influence on how people were educated in writing, reading, and public speaking. In this view, discourse is the means by which people make things happen: people use discourse

to persuade, to cause others to act, to change the world. Because of this, conscious, strategic choice has often been stressed over other aspects of how discourse is shaped and interpreted. In school, for example, students have often been led to suppose that anyone, in any situation, can be eloquent and persuasive if he or she knows how to design discourse effectively. This focus on strategy was also characteristic of twentieth-century Saussurean linguistics, the immediate disciplinary context for linguistic discourse analysis, which developed in large part out of the concerns of philologists who studied literary texts.

This set of ideas about discourse underlies the productive tradition in rhetorical studies, the tradition of analysis in the service of strategic, conscious, designed communicative action. By analyzing the potential audience in advance, by inventorying one's storehouse of logical, emotional, and ethical appeals, through systematic intentional strategies for developing topics and lines of argument, and by marshaling language's resources of sound and structure, a rhetor can choose the best thing to say for the situation. This view of discourse could be said to characterize the more rhetorical approaches in sociolinguistics, too. Although relatively few sociolinguists explicitly describe their goal in rhetorical terms, those that see speakers as agents, texts as the result of choice, and grammar and all the other strategies there are for text-building as resources provide ways to think about how people could change how they talk or decide on better things to say. Interactional sociolinguistics is one example (Gumperz, 1982a, 1982b; Tannen, 1984, 1989; Scollon and Scollon, 1981), with its focus on "discourse strategies" and the ways in which people can be empowered as rhetorical agents by learning to analyze their own and others' interactional styles. Among students of variation and change in language, LePage and Tabouret-Keller (1985) and others who think of the details of utterances as the results of "acts of identity" by individual speakers also take what could be called a rhetorical approach to text-building, as do people who study strategic uses of "language crossing" (Rampton, 1995a, 1999) or "referee design" (Bell, 1984).

A somewhat different view of discourse has its roots in the reflective tradition of literary study and philosophy rather than in the productive tradition of written composition and public speaking. In this view, the controlling metaphor for discourse might be said to be adaptation rather than strategy. From this perspective, discourse is part of the continual, automatic dance of coordination that is human social life. Ways of talking circulate; people are "spoken through" as they produce texts out of prior texts, ready-made sentiments, and pre-molded formulas for voicing them. In this view, texts are best understood as responses to situations, often more automatic, less conscious, and less designed than speakers may imagine, and often allowing far less choice than they may imagine.

In this tradition, discourse analysis is used primarily in the service of description. The primary role of discourse analysis in this tradition is to uncover the ways in which discourse is outside of the control of rhetorical agents, shaped by larger social forces; the ways in which strategy and choice are more illusory than we might like to think. In this view, grammar and the other sources of influence on discourse are more likely to appear as constraints than as resources. In sociolinguistics, this approach to discourse is reflected in areas such as Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1995; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974; Goodwin, 1981; Atkinson and Heritage, 1984; Sidnell, 2010), which focuses on the ways in which discourse is organized "sequentially" as a series of responses to immediately preceding discourse rather than as the result of strategic choice. In variation study, approaches that could be said to reflect this way of thinking about discourse see the details of people's utterances as situationally cued and automatic,

particularly in the unselfconscious “vernacular” mode which is often the focus of attention (Labov, 1972a, 1994); in social psychology, models of unconscious processes by which speakers automatically “accommodate” to one another’s styles (Giles and Powesland, 1975; Street and Hopper, 1982; Thakerar, Giles, and Cheshire, 1982) also stress the adaptive facet of discourse. People who work in the theoretical context of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Wodak, 1996) focus on the ways in which people’s discursive behavior is less the result of free choice, and more the result of external sociopolitical pressures, than people are led to believe.

It is not always easy to reconcile these perspectives. From the discourse-as-adaptation perspective, people who think of discourse as strategy are deluding themselves. They are under the influence of an outdated ideology that makes it appear that individuals can be autonomous agentive authors of original ideas and words. From the discourse-as-strategy perspective, people who think of discourse as adaptation can seem cynical and passive, unwilling to explore what they could do to help accomplish the practical tasks that need to be done, such as helping students learn to write or speak effectively and otherwise giving voices and choices to people who are silent. I suggest that we take both perspectives. I show in the chapters to follow that while there are ways in which discourse is necessarily adaptive, aspects of text-building in connection with which the idea of strategy is irrelevant, there are also ways in which discourse is necessarily strategic. Throughout the book, I try to stress both the ways in which discourse represents adaptation in the context of constraint and the ways in which discourse represents strategy in the context of resources.

1.7 Language and Linguaging

Doing discourse analysis, and thinking about discourse analysis, leads almost inevitably to questions about the conventional notion of “a language.” When we start to look at actual extended instances of talk rather than analyzing hypothetical sentences or isolated phrases elicited from field informants, we begin to notice that neither linguists’ “descriptive” grammars nor the pedagogical grammars used in teaching language account for all of what people actually do as they interact through talk, sign, or writing. Sentence structures which, according to such grammars, are incomplete, incorrect, or even impossible are, in fact, routine in some situations. People use words that are not in the dictionary, and others understand them. Most grammars have nothing to say about the ways in which gesture and gaze and paralinguistic cues such as intonation contribute to meaning-making.

Furthermore, thinking systematically about the processes by which texts are built and interpreted in actual interactions causes us to notice that the relationship between “language” and “discourse” is not convincingly described in the conventional vocabulary of language pedagogy or linguistics, either. People do not actually appear to do what they do by “using” a body of “language” or “knowledge of language” or “linguistic competence” that they already possess. Language seems, instead, to be created by speakers as they interact, noticing, repeating, and sometimes making reflective generalizations about what other people do, in the process of evoking and creating a world. To think of discourse as “language use” means imagining that “language” could exist prior to being “used,” but in fact people learn how to talk by talking, whether as children or as adults, in the continual process of exploring new ways of being and acting.

Many linguists and other theorists of communication have noticed this. Becker (1991, 1995) suggests that “language” is not an object, but a process, “*linguaging*.” Becker draws on the work of phenomenologist Ortega y Gasset (1957: 242), who points out that “what [linguistics] calls ‘language’ really has no existence, it is a utopian and artificial image constructed by linguistics itself. In effect, language is never ‘a fact,’ for the simple reason that it is...always making and unmaking itself.” Linguists who associate themselves with the “*integrationalist*” school (Harris, 1980, 1987; Hopper, 1992; Toolan, 1996; Taylor, 1997) also suggest that language should be imagined not as an object (a body of knowledge) but as a process, embedded in and inseparable from the rest of the process of human social life. Dialectologists have long known that it is impossible to find clear boundaries between languages and dialects. In sociolinguistics, anthropology, and applied linguistics, scholars such as Gal and Irvine (1995) and Makoni and Pennycook (2005) explore the European nationalist ideology that underlies the idea that each nation should have its own language.

In this “*post-structuralist*” view, language is an activity. For certain purposes, people reflecting back on this activity may try to create static models of the verbal elements of interaction that recur. These are what are called “*grammars*” or “*grammatical rules*,” and they can be useful, for example, when a person is learning to interact in a new world of discourse (a world with different categories, different sounds, different prior texts, different people, different media, different purposes). Just as it can be useful to have teachers and textbooks to provide shortcuts into new interactional worlds, individual speakers may well create their own shortcuts, their own grammars. But understanding language cannot consist entirely of describing sets of conventional ways of *linguaging*, as useful as such sets can be to language learners or to designers of talking software. Understanding *linguaging* means understanding the process of discourse through which people constantly figure out what to say, how to say things, and how to understand what others say, in the process of interacting with others.

We still lack a vocabulary that corresponds to this way of thinking about language. We still use “*language*” as a noun. To do otherwise in an introductory book such as this one would be distracting. But here and throughout the book, I have also tried out some slightly unusual ways of referring to what are commonly referred to as “*languages*.” Sometimes I use the conventional formulations, speaking of texts as being “*in English*” or speakers as “*speaking Chinese*,” or talking about what “*the Arabic language*” provides in the way of constraints on discourse that is “*in Arabic*.” But I have also experimented with other ways of referring to these ideas. Rather than talking about “*the English language*” I sometimes talk about “*the traditions associated with English*.” Instead of “*speaking Chinese*” I have tried formulations like “*drawing on the resources of Chinese*.” Instead of “*language*,” I have occasionally talked about “*linguaging*.” Discourse analysts ought to take the lead in developing some new conventions for talking about what we study; I hope this tentative effort encourages others to rethink some of our formulations.

1.8 Particularity, Theory, and Method

Discourse analysts often work with small sets of data: the discourse surrounding a single incident, five or ten conversations rather than hundreds of experimental trials, three or nine interesting and rich cases rather than a representative sample of a whole population.

Sometimes we work with a single text at a time. Our work, if it is done well, is descriptively “thick” in Geertz’s (1973) sense. We would often rather describe the small differences between different particular cases than generalize about mostly shared features in a way that would facilitate comparisons of large sets of cases, and when we do work with large data sets, the way corpus linguists do, we tend to decide what to count not by using predetermined coding schemes but on the basis of preliminary smaller-scale analyses. We are often interested in discovering not just the main reasons for things, but as many reasons as we can. We are interested in the details of the texts we study and in the processes that give rise to these details. Our work is, in other words, often focused on the particular rather than the general, and, as a result, our results are better suited for suggesting how processes of human interaction work than for making generalizations about the results of these processes.

It is tempting, however, for discourse analysts to make such generalizations. Large-scale social theories are tempting, for one thing, because they suggest large-scale solutions to social problems. If we could figure out the reason why men and women miscommunicate, we could show men and women how not to miscommunicate. If we could find the root cause of linguistic discrimination in a pan-human, natural struggle for power, then perhaps we could solve the problem by redirecting power relations. If we could explain the process of learning to write in terms of genre, then all we would have to do in university writing classes would be to show students how to analyze and duplicate academic prose. But one-dimensional explanations suggested by large theories often turn out not to work, and large generalizations based on small studies (even sometimes ones based on large studies) turn out to be untrustworthy. Generalizations about “what women do,” for example, turn out to be accurate only as statements about what the particular women that were studied did. Connections between language and social identity turn out to be extremely complex, so that disparities in how linguistic choices are socially evaluated cannot be explained solely in terms of disparities in “prestige,” “power,” or “symbolic capital.” Learning to speak or write in new ways has to do with learning the structural conventions and lexical formulas of new genres, but it also has to do with developing new social relationships, new senses of self, new ways of seeing the world. Large-scale theories almost inevitably obscure the fact that human actions, discursive and otherwise, are always multiply determined, the result of a large number of intersecting factors, one of which is the particular human being who is acting for a particular set of purposes in a particular situation. If we make premature decisions about what we are seeing based on expectations about what we will see provided by theories we select in advance, we risk failing to pay attention to the multiplicity of resources and constraints that surrounds any human action.

The trouble, of course, is that it is impossible not to have expectations. That is, it is impossible for observations to be “theory-neutral.” On the most basic neurological level, we could not perceive anything if we did not have a way of interpreting sensory information, and a way of interpreting is inevitably based on a set of expectations about what is relatively likely and what is not. It may be relatively easy, at least sometimes, to identify and try to set aside large theories, perhaps particularly the ones that have names (the theory that class struggle is at the root of all human behavior, the theory that women’s experience is always fundamentally different from men’s, the theory that free competition in the economic marketplace eventually leads to social equilibrium). We can also work to become self-conscious about the widespread popular theories that

sometimes go unnamed (the theory that people from different countries are fundamentally different, the theory that accent reflects moral character, the theory that change is good or the theory that change is bad). But it is always very difficult to identify the small theories with which we inevitably approach any new phenomenon.

For this reason, it is crucial to think carefully about what our approaches to new phenomena are like. It is crucial to have a disciplined, systematic way of thinking about new things, to minimize the distorting, focus-narrowing effects of theories, large and small. In other words, clearly articulated research methodology is essential, because methodology helps protect us from premature theorizing. Discourse analysis, as I present it here, can provide some of the rigor and systematicity that is sometimes missing in interpretive work about discourse in the critical tradition, which is often less particularistic and sometimes jumps sooner to theory.

1.9 From Text Outward

When you study a text or a transcript, you are always, in some sense, trying to understand it. But to understand a text completely would be to arrive at its true meaning, and, since meaning is always particular and situational (in other words, what a text means depends on who is uttering it, why, when, who is listening, and so on), this is impossible. Analyses of discourse are always partial and provisional. Any particular utterance presupposes an entire world, an entire set of psychologies, an entire linguistic history. If discourse analysis is always partial, how much is enough? If we could, in theory and given enough time, spend a lifetime on a phrase and still not have finished describing the world, where do we stop? How far outward from the text do we need to go?

The answer depends, obviously, on our goals in doing the analysis. If the question is “Do English-speakers typically encode agents as grammatical subjects?” then all that is needed is to see whether or not, in a corpus of utterances, the semantic agent usually appears as the grammatical subject. But if the question is “Why do English speakers encode agents as subjects?” or “How do conventions about representing agency in texts reflect dominant epistemologies?” or “How does a social institution constitute itself via representations of itself as agent?” then the task has to be larger. Some discourse analysts, often linguists who are primarily interested in linguistic structure and language change, ask questions of the former kind. Many others, linguists but also other people whose research questions are about the connections between language and social life rather than about language per se, ask questions of the latter kind. Such people often find it necessary to work far outward from texts into their cognitive and sociocultural contexts, and they often find that the way to do this is to combine discourse analysis with the methods of ethnography or statistical analysis, with the conceptual frameworks of rhetorical or social theory, with research findings from psychology, history, or language acquisition, and so on.

People who study discourse ask many different kinds of questions, and they need many different theoretical and methodological tools to answer them. What I describe in this book is a set of tools that has been useful, or is potentially useful, in disciplinary and interdisciplinary inquiry of many sorts. Discourse analysis, as I describe it here, is rigorous to the extent that it is grounded in the closest possible attention to linguistic and contextual detail. Discourse analysis starts in linguistic analysis, and many of the people

who developed the ways of working I describe have been linguists. Linguists are skilled and practiced at attending to the details of language form and function, and we have these skills to offer to people from other research traditions who wonder about the role of discourse in human life. Discourse analysis is systematic to the extent that it encourages analysts to develop multiple explanations before they argue for one. Interdisciplinarity is thus not just an attractive feature of discourse analysis but a central fact about it. Discourse analysts have often drawn on disciplines other than linguistics for possible ways of explaining things, and we should continue to search as widely as we can.

1.10 Summary

People in many fields, with very diverse research projects, make use of discourse analysis. Although there is no universally agreed-on definition of discourse analysis, most practitioners use “discourse” to mean any actual talk, writing, or signing. To those who use the term, “discourses,” in the plural, are conventional ways of talking that create and perpetuate systems of ideology, sets of beliefs about how the world works and what is natural. “Analysis” involves various ways of systematically taking things apart or looking at them from multiple perspectives or in multiple ways. Discourse analysis is thus a methodology that is useful in answering many kinds of questions, both questions that linguists traditionally ask and questions asked by people in other humanistic and social-scientific disciplines. All uses of discourse analysis result in descriptions, but the end goal of discourse analysis is not always simply description of the status quo but social critique and, sometimes, intervention. For example, the exploratory analyses of various texts from a museum exhibit that were used in this chapter as examples of some of the things discourse analysis can uncover resulted both in explanations of how a museum’s talk to the public can be designed and how it can be effective, and in critiques of some aspects of how the museum chose to represent itself and its audiences.

Discourse analysts work with “texts,” pieces of discourse that have or are given boundaries and treated as wholes. Discourse analysts work outward from texts to an understanding of their contexts, trying to uncover the multiple reasons why the texts they study are the way they are and no other way. To insure that we pay systematic attention to all the possible reasons for a text’s having the form and function it does, it is useful to refer to an analytical heuristic: a set of broad questions to ask about the texts with which we work. This helps insure that we do not just find out what we hope or plan to find out, and it results in analyses that are multidimensional and as sensitive as possible to all the many reasons why human languaging sounds, looks, and works in the ways it does. The chapters that follow are organized around one such heuristic.

Working with actual talk and writing leads analysts to ask several important questions about language and communication in general. One such question has to do with where we see meaning as located: in texts, in speakers’ intentions, in hearers’ interpretations, or in some combination of these. Another question has to do with whether we see discourse as fundamentally strategic – creatively designed to accomplish something – or as fundamentally adaptive – automatically responsive to facts about the situation and the interaction at hand. Doing discourse analysis also leads us to question conventional ways of thinking about what “language” is and what “languages” are and draws our attention to the process we could call “languaging” instead. Finally, we touched on how

to move from an analysis of a text or a small body of texts to more general claims about the world and how to embed linguistic analysis of the kinds covered in this book in analyses of culture, history, psychology, politics, and the like.

Further Reading

The analytical heuristic described here is based on the work of Becker (1995). General overviews of discourse analysis, in addition to the present one, include Blommaert (2005), Gee (2014), Jones (2012), Paltridge (2012), Schiffrin (1994), and Strauss and Feiz (2014). Each delimits the field somewhat differently. A reader edited by Jaworski and Coupland (2014) brings together some of the foundational work in the field, much of which is referred to or discussed in the chapters to follow, although some of the selections are so truncated that readers would do well to locate the originals instead. Handbooks that include overview articles on various aspects of discourse analysis are Gee and Handford (2012) and Tannen, Hamilton, and Schiffrin (2015). Johnstone (2000a) discusses practical and theoretical aspects of research design for qualitative analysis of texts and talk. Fairclough (1985) introduces the distinction between descriptive and critical discourse analysis and summarizes the goals of the latter. Recent overviews include Fairclough (2010), Machin and Mayr (2012), and Wodak and Meyer (2016). An interesting collection of papers about the problems and possibilities associated with entextualization, as practiced both by discourse analysts and by the people they study, is Silverstein and Urban (1996). On transcription, see Ochs (1979a), Edwards and Lampert (1993), Bucholtz (2000), and Jenks (2013). The metaphor of culture as text and humanistic research as hermeneutic interpretation is associated particularly with Clifford Geertz (1973). On corpus analysis, see Biber and Reppen (2015), Crawford and Csomay (2015), and McEnery (2012). Interdisciplinary journals that specialize in work by discourse analysts include *Text&Talk*, *Discourse in Society*, *Discourse & Communication*, *Discourse Processes*, *Discourse Studies*, and *Critical Discourse Studies*; many other journals, associated with various disciplines, also include reports of discourse analytical research.