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PART V AUDIO AND VIDEO

10 Discourse Analysis as a Way of Analysing Naturally Occurring Talk

Jonathan Potter

This chapter will focus on the way discourse analysis can be used to study naturally occurring talk. This may seem to be a straightforward task, and in the course of this chapter I will do my best to make it so. Yet I also want to explore some complexities that may seem like diversions, but which, if they do not get explored, are likely to remain as traps for analysts to get caught in at later times.

So what complexities are there here? First, and most immediately, there are a whole range of things that have been called discourse analysis. Secondly, the kind of discourse analysis I will be describing is a broad approach to social life which combines meta-theoretical assumptions, theoretical ideas, analytic orientations and bodies of work. Thirdly, it is quite misleading to think of discourse analysis as a method in the way that social psychologists and many sociologists would conceive of that term. Fourthly, the status of naturally occurring talk as a topic is itself far from unproblematic.

In the first part of the chapter I will discuss these four issues as a way of introducing some of the central features of a discourse analytic perspective. I will then move on in the second half of the chapter to discuss an extended example which is intended to illustrate something of the analytic mentality involved in doing discourse analysis.

Issues in the discourse analysis of naturally occurring talk

Stories of discourse

What is discourse analysis? This is a tricky question and its answers are changing rather quickly. One way of thinking about some of the species of discourse analysis is to consider them as having evolved in the different disciplinary environments of linguistics, cognitive psychology, sociolinguistics and poststructuralism.

In the past, the name 'discourse analysis' has been applied to a range of rather different approaches to social science. In linguistics it has been applied to work on the way sentences or utterances cohere into discourse.

For example, it has examined the way words such as 'however' and 'but' operate, along with different kinds of references that occur between sentences. One of the aims of this work was to duplicate on a wider canvas the success of linguistic analyses on units such as sentences (Brown and Yule, 1983). In cognitive psychology the focus has been on the way mental scripts and schemata are used to make sense of narrative. Do people work with story grammars to understand narratives in the way they use sentence grammars to understand sentences (Van Dijk and Kintch, 1983)? Again, the hope was to duplicate some of the (perceived) success of work on grammar in the psychological domain.

Another distinctive style of discourse analysis developed in linguistics through work on classroom interaction. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) attempted to provide a systematic model to describe typical interaction patterns in teaching based around 'initiation–response–feedback' structures. For example,

Teacher:	What is keeping the mercury up?	(*Initiation*)
Pupil:	The vacuum sucking.	(*Response*)
Teacher:	Not really, Peter. Susan?	(*Feedback*)

The goal here was to produce a model that would make sense of discourse structure in a whole range of different settings (Coulthard and Montgomery, 1981).

In poststructuralism and literary theory a very different tradition developed, sometimes called continental discourse analysis to differentiate it from its rather more strait-laced Anglo-Saxon counterparts. This is most associated with Michel Foucault, and is less concerned with discourse in terms of specific interaction as with how a discourse, or a set of 'statements', comes to constitute objects and subjects. For example, medical discourse may come to constitute particular objects as distinct and factual ('vapours', 'HIV+') and the doctor as a particular individual with knowledge and authority. (For an accessible discussion of Foucault's notion of discourse, see McHoul and Grace, 1993.)

There are, then, at least these four somewhat independent forms of discourse analysis with different disciplinary homes. To make things even more complicated, discourse analysis is sometimes used as an inclusive label for some or all of these approaches combined with speech act work, Gricean pragmatics, linguistic presupposition, critical linguistics and conversation analysis (Stubbs, 1983; Van Dijk, 1985). The rough logic of inclusion here is an emphasis on language function and/or a concern with language outside of the restricted categories of grammar, phonetics and phonemics.

The rest of this chapter will concentrate on yet another variant of discourse analysis. This developed initially in the field of sociology and more recently in social psychology and communications (Billig, 1992; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This is distinctive in various ways. Discourse analysts in this tradition reject

the cognitivism of the work in linguistics and cognitive psychology because it makes it very difficult to properly address the way discourse is oriented to action (Edwards, 1997). They treat the interactional analysis of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) as overly based on rather mechanistic linguistic analysis and inattentive to the complex social practices that take place in classrooms and similar locations. They have expressed similar doubts about Foucauldian approaches to discourse, while being impressed by, and influenced by, some of their insights.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis of this latter kind (henceforth DA) is characterized by a meta-theoretical emphasis on anti-realism and constructionism. That is, DA emphasizes the way versions of the world, of society, events and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse. On the one hand, this leads to a concern with participants' constructions and how they are accomplished and undermined; and, on the other, it leads to a recognition of the constructed and contingent nature of researchers' own versions of the world. Indeed, it treats realism, whether developed by participants or researchers, as a rhetorical production that can itself be decomposed and studied (Edwards et al., 1995; Gergen, 1994; Potter, 1992).

As a complement to this, there is an emphasis on reflexivity: for example, what are the implications from the conclusions of discourse analytic research for the practice of DA and for its literary forms, including this very text? Note the way I have introduced this chapter using the conventional homogenizing categorizations of research specialities and the familiar rhetoric of progress. Reflexivity encourages us to consider the way a text such as this is a version, selectively working up coherence and incoherence, telling historical stories, presenting and, indeed, constituting an objective, out-there reality (Ashmore, 1989; Atkinson, 1990; Potter, 1996a).

DA has an analytic commitment to studying discourse as *texts and talk in social practices*. That is, the focus is not on language as an abstract entity such as a lexicon and set of grammatical rules (in linguistics), a system of differences (in structuralism), a set of rules for transforming statements (in Foucauldian genealogies). Instead, it is the medium for interaction; analysis of discourse becomes, then, analysis of what people do. One theme that is particularly emphasized here is the rhetorical or argumentative organization of talk and texts; claims and versions are constructed to undermine alternatives (Billig, 1987, 1991).

This conception of the focus of DA may make it seem to be pitched at a level of analysis somewhere between studies of individual psychology and studies of structural sociology. On this reading it would be an approach falling within the traditional remit of social psychology or micro-sociology. However, these kinds of distinctions have been made problematic by DA. On the one hand, DA has eaten away at traditional psychological notions

by reformulating them in discursive terms. For example, a classic psychological notion such as a cognitive script can be reworked by considering the sorts of business that people do by 'script formulating' descriptions of their own or others' behaviour (Edwards, 1994). The suggestion is that there is a whole field of discursive psychology which is amenable to systematic study and has hardly been touched in mainstream psychology (Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1992).

On the other hand, the micro–macro distinction has also been made problematic. It has been blurred by two kinds of work. First, there are now a range of conversation analytic studies which are concerned with the way in which the institutionally specific properties of a setting such as a news interview, a doctor–patient consultation or an award ceremony are constituted in talk rather than being structurally determined in any simple way (Boden and Zimmerman, 1991; Drew and Heritage, 1992). For example, pedagogic interaction certainly happens in school classrooms, and yet much of what happens in classrooms is not pedagogic (playing around, chatting) while much recognizably pedagogic interaction ('test' questions, encouraging discovery) happens over family breakfast tables or with a partner in front of the television. Secondly, there is work on the way people produce stories of social organization in their talk. For example, Wetherell and Potter (1992) studied the way particular constructions of social groups, processes of conflict and influence, histories, and so on, were drawn on as practical resources for blaming minority groups for their own disadvantaged social position. That is, social structure becomes part of interaction as it is worked up, invoked and reworked (Potter, 1996a).

Typical discourse analytic studies focus on transcripts of talk from everyday or institutional settings, on transcripts of open-ended interviews, or on documents of some kind. Sometimes these different materials are combined together in the same study. DA is overwhelmingly qualitative, although the principled argument is not against quantification *per se*, but against the way counting and coding often obscures the activities being done with talk and text (see Heritage, Chapter 11 this volume; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Schegloff, 1993).

Discourse analysis and method

In much traditional social research, method is understood as something that can be codified with specific guidelines which, if not guaranteeing good research, are a necessary condition for its conduct. Indeed, it is often the case that the research conclusions are justified by reference to the correct and complete following of procedures such as operationalizing variables, getting high levels of inter-rater reliability for codings, and so on. Discourse analysis is not like this. The analytic procedure used to arrive at claims is often quite different from the way those claims are justified.

A large part of doing discourse analysis is a craft skill, more like bike riding or chicken sexing than following the recipe for a mild chicken rogan

josh. Conversation analysts sometimes talk of developing an *analytic mentality*, which captures what is involved rather nicely (Psathas, 1990). This makes it hard to describe and learn. But that does not mean that the claims are necessarily hard to evaluate – if you cannot easily say precisely how someone has learned to ride a bike, you do not have so much difficulty saying whether they have fallen off or not. Likewise, there are a range of ways in which the adequacy of discourse analytic studies can be evaluated, including a focus on deviant cases, checking that participants' themselves orient to claimed phenomena, coherence with other discourse analytic studies, and, most importantly, the evaluation that readers themselves can make when they are presented with a transcript along side of its analytic interpretations (Potter, 1996b).

In traditional stories of method in social research you have a question and then you search for a method to answer that question. For example, you may be interested in the 'factors' that lead to condom use in sexual encounters, and ponder whether to use an experiment with vignettes, some open-ended interviews, or DA to check them out. DA is not like that. Some questions are simply not coherent from a discourse analytic perspective. For example, the kinds of assumptions about factors and outcomes that underpin a lot of thinking in traditional social psychology and survey research do not mesh with its rhetorical and normative logic. Rather than conceiving of a world of discrete variables with discrete effects, in DA there are constructions and versions that may be adopted, responded to or undermined. Thus a categorization, say, may be undermined by a particularization; no upshot is guaranteed (Billig, 1991). Norms are *oriented to*; that is, they are not templates for action but provide a way of interpreting deviations. The absence of a return greeting does not disconfirm a regularity; rather it is the basis for inference: the recipient is rude, sad or deaf perhaps (Heritage, 1988).

So what kinds of questions are coherent within DA? Given the general focus is on texts and talk as social practices, there has been a dual focus on the practices themselves and on the resources that are drawn on in those practices. Take gender inequalities for example. Studies have considered both the way in which such inequalities are constructed, made factual and justified in talk, and the resources ('interpretive repertoires', identities, category systems) that are used to manufacture coherent and persuasive justifications that work to sustain those inequalities (Gill, 1993; Marshall and Wetherell, 1989; Wetherell et al., 1987).

Naturally occurring talk as topic

I am going to focus here on DA specifically as applied to naturally occurring talk. However, it is important to note that this topic is not as simple as it might appear. Naturally occurring talk can be relatively straightforwardly defined as spoken language produced entirely independently of the actions of the researcher, whether it is everyday conversation

over the telephone, the records of a company board meeting, or the interaction between doctor and patient in a surgery. It is natural in the specific sense that it is not 'got up' by the researcher using an interview schedule, a questionnaire, an experimental protocol or some such social research technology.

Although this is useful in highlighting how far traditional researchers are implicated in the production of 'data', it also implies a hierarchy moving from somewhat ephemeral interaction in the laboratory to more real interaction happening naturally out in the world. A better conceptualization treats naturally occurring talk not as a straightforward discovered object, but as a theoretical and analytic stance on conversational interaction. This may seem rather abstruse but it has two advantages. On the one hand, it differentiates DA from other work on records of interaction such as content analysis which involves the kinds of coding and counting that obscures the subtly contexted nature of conversational interaction as well as the sorts of turn by turn displays of understanding and repair that have been effectively used in conversation analysis (Psathas, 1995). On the other hand, it provides a different perspective on research procedures such as interviews. Instead of treating these as a machinery for harvesting data from respondents, they can be viewed as an arena for interaction in its own right; that is natural-interaction-in-interview. What I am suggesting, then, is that it is properly the analytic and theoretical stance that constitutes its object as naturally occurring talk, and we should be wary of accepting too readily assumptions about what kinds of talk are natural and what are not.

This point is particularly important for showing what is distinctive about the considerable body of discourse analytic work which has used open-ended interviews. When interviews are treated as a machinery for harvesting psychologically and linguistically interesting responses, the research is inevitably focused on those elements of interviews contributed by the participant rather than those from the researcher. However, it is possible to conceptualize interviews as arenas for interaction between two or more parties. That is, we can treat them as a form of natural conversational interaction, by analysing them the same way that we might a telephone conversation between friends or the cross-examination in a courtroom. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) provide one of the most thoroughgoing attempts to use interviews in this way, treating materials originally collected for a study of social identity as examples of unfolding conversational interaction where the sense of social categories is refined and reworked. Furthermore, once this perspective on interviews is adopted, the standard methodology textbook injunctions to be as neutral and uninvolved as possible become highly problematic. It only makes sense as part of the fiction that the researcher can somehow disappear from the interaction if only they can make themselves passive enough – in DA it has been productive to be actively engaged and even argumentative during interviews (Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

Having resisted a too simple distinction between natural and artificial talk I do not want to diminish the difficulties of working with interview talk. It is contrived; it is subject to powerful expectations about social science research fielded by participants; and there are particular difficulties in extrapolating from interview talk to activities in other settings. Discourse analysts are increasingly turning away from interviews to focus on materials less affected by the formulations and assumptions of the researcher.

In this discussion I have addressed a number of background issues for discourse analytic research. There are a range of other concerns to do with transcription, interview conduct, coding, forms of validation, writing up discourse research that there is no space to discuss. (For a more detailed discussion of these, see Coyle, 1995; Gill, 1996; Potter, 1996b; Potter and Wetherell, 1987, 1994, 1995; Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995; Wooffitt, 1990, 1993.) For the rest of this chapter I will focus on a particular example, with the aim of highlighting something of the analytic mentality involved in doing discourse analytic research on talk. In addition, I hope to illustrate some of the recurring themes in such work as well as exploring some of the similarities and differences between conversation and discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis of naturally occurring talk

There are a wide range of different ways of analysing discourse. It is useful, for example, to make a broad distinction between a focus on the kinds of resources drawn on in discourse and the practices in which those resources are used. The emphasis here will be on the latter kind of study. What I hope to do is highlight some of the concerns that analysis works with, and one of the best ways of doing this is to work with some specific materials. I will try to avoid the common goal in writing about method which is to provide justifications to other academics rather than assist in the conduct of analysis itself.

Princess Diana and 'I dunno'

I have chosen to start with a piece of talk that is interesting, and probably familiar, at least in its broad outline, to many readers. It comes from a BBC television interview; the interviewer is Martin Bashir and the interviewee is Princess Diana.

(1) *Bashir:* The Queen described nineteen ninety two as
her (.) annus horribilis, .hh and it was in that year that
Andrew Morton's book about you was published.
Princess: Um hm. ((nods))
Bashir: .hh Did you ↑ever (.) meet Andrew Morton or
personally (.) help him with the book?

Princess: In never- I never met him, no.
(1.0)
Bashir: Did you ever (.) personally assist him with
the writing of his book.
(0.8)
Princess: A lot of people .hhh ((clears throat))
saw the distress that my life was in. (.)
And they felt (.) felt it was a supportive thing
to help (0.2) in the way that they did.
Bashir: Did you (.) allow your ↑friends, >your close friends,<
to speak to Andrew °Morton°?
Princess: Yes I did. Y[es, I did
Bashir: [°Why°?
Princess: I was (.) at the end of my tether (.)
I was (.) desperate (.)
>I think I was so fed up with being< (.)
seen as someone who was a ba:sket case (.)
because I am a very strong person (.)
and I know (.) that causes complications, (.)
in the system (.) that I live in.
(1.0) ((smiles and purses lips))
Bashir: How would a book change that.
→ *Princess:* I ↑dunno. ((raises eyebrows, looks away))
Maybe people have a better understanding (.)
maybe there's a lot of women out there
who suffer (.) on the same level
but in a different environment (.)
who are unable to: (.) stand up for themselves (.)
because (.) their self-esteem is (.) cut into two.
→ I dunno ((shakes head))
Bashir: .hh What effect do you think the book had on (.)
your husband and the Royal Family?
Princess: I think they were (.) shocked,
and horrified,
and very disappointed.
(0.8)
Bashir: Can you understand why?
Princess: (Well) I think Mr Dimbleby's book (0.2)
was a shock to a lot of people,
and disappointment as well.
(*Panorama*, BBC1, 20 November 1995 – see Appendix for transcript conventions)

The first thing to note here is that even a short sequence of interaction of this kind is enormously rich, and could be the stimulus for a very wide range of different discourse analytic studies. I am going to focus principally on just the two lines that have been arrowed; the two 'I dunno's'. Why these? There are three reasons, all of which illustrate different facets of doing work of this kind.

First, as will become increasingly clear, these fragments of talk relate to broader and established analytic concerns with fact construction and the role of descriptions in interaction. The point, then, is that although I have not come to this material with a pre-set hypothesis of the kind that a social

psychologist might have when designing an experiment, my way into it is related to a wide range of prior interests, knowledge and concerns. However, there is nothing particularly special about the topic of fact construction; a range of different established interests could be bought to bear on this same material.

Secondly, these fragments are easily treated as the trivial details of interaction. If we were to make a précis of the interaction we would probably not draw attention to them. On the video they sound almost throwaway. However, one of the features of talk that has been strongly emphasized by Harvey Sacks (1992) and other conversation analysts is that what seem to be its details are fundamental. Social scientists often treat talk as a conduit for information between speakers: there is a message and it is passed from one person to another. When we use this picture it is easy to imagine that what is important is some basic package of information, and then there is a lot of rather unimportant noise added to the signal: hesitations, pauses, overlaps, choice of specific words, and so on. For conversation analysts this view is fundamentally misguided. Rather than treating these features of talk as simply a blurred edge on the pure message, these features are treated as determining precisely what action is being performed as well as providing a rich analytic resource for understanding what that activity is.

It is for this reason that talk is carefully transcribed as it is delivered rather than being rendered into a conventional 'playscript' that is common in some kinds of qualitative work. Note that it is sometimes complained that such transcription is unnecessary, unhelpful or even – sin of sins – positivistic! However, it is important to remember that the potential playscript that often passes for transcript is itself highly conventionalized and buys into a whole set of more or less implicit assumptions about interaction.

The third reason for focusing on 'I dunno' is that it provides a neat way of contrasting DA with a cognitive psychological approach to talk. What might a cognitive psychologist make of 'I dunno's'? There are all sorts of possibilities, but one approach that might be taken is to treat such utterances as 'uncertainty tokens'; that is, words or expressions that people use to report states of uncertainty. This would be in line with the general cognitive psychological approach of relating language use to individuals' cognitive processes and representations (Edwards, 1997). Considering 'I dunno's' therefore has the virtue of allowing us to compare and contrast a cognitive and discursive approach to talk.

One of the notable features of discourse analytic work is that the best way into some materials like this may be to consider *other* materials or *other* sorts of findings. At its most basic, a good feel for some of the standard features of everyday and institutional talk is particularly useful for producing high-quality analyses (Nofsinger, 1991, provides a basic introduction and overview). In this case, I suggest that one of the ways into Princess Diana's 'I dunno's' is to consider the way issues of stake and interest have been conceptualized in discursive psychology.

Stake as a participants' concern

Work in the ethnomethodological and conversation analytic tradition has long highlighted the importance of accountability as a general concern. More recently, discourse analysts dealing with psychological issues – discursive psychologists – have emphasized the significance that participants place on issues of stake and interest (Edwards and Potter, 1992). People treat each other as entities with desires, motives, institutional allegiances and so on, as having a stake in their actions. Referencing stake is one principal way of discounting the significance of an action or reworking its nature. For example, a blaming can be discounted as merely a product of spite; an offer may be discounted as an attempt to influence.

Here is a explicit and familiar example where the speaker invokes an interest to undercut a (reported) claim. The extract is from a current affairs programme in which the author Salman Rushdie is being interviewed by David Frost. Frost is asking about the fatwah – the religious death sentence on Rushdie.

(2) *Frost:* And how could they cancel it now? Can they cancel it – they say they can't.

→ *Rushdie:* Yeah, but you know, they would, wouldn't they, as somebody once said. The thing is, without going into the kind of arcana of theology, there is no technical problem. The problem is not technical. The problem is that they don't want to.
(Public Broadcasting Service, 26 November 1993, transcription by newscaster)

Rushdie's response to the claim that the fatwah cannot be cancelled is to discount the claim as obviously motivated. The familiar phrase 'they would, wouldn't they' treats the Iranians' claim as something to be expected: it is the sort of thing that people with that background, those interests, that set of attitudes *would* say; and it formulates that predictability as shared knowledge. This extract illustrates the potential for invoking stake and interest to discount claims.

Both discourse and conversation analysts have stressed that where some difficulty or issue is widespread there are likely to be some well-developed procedures for dealing with it. For example, given the established procedures that exist for managing turn-taking we would expect there to be some procedures to exist for terminating conversations, and this is what is found (Levinson, 1983; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). Or, to take a more discourse analytic example, given that scientists tend to keep separate the inconsistent repertoires of terms they use for justifying their own claims and undermining those of opponents, we would expect that some devices would be developed for dealing with situations where those repertoires come together; and this is what is found (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). Following this logic, we might expect to find procedures that people use to resist the kind of discounting seen in Extract 2.

All kinds of possibilities exist. Here is a candidate discursive technique for undermining discounting. It was not the product of a systematic search; rather I came across it while reading the newspaper and thinking about this issue. It comes from an article in the *Guardian* newspaper headlined 'Psychiatrist Reveals the Agony and the Lunacy of Great Artists'.

(3) The stereotype of the tortured genius suffering for his art and losing his mind in a sea of depression, sexual problems and drink turns out to be largely true, a psychiatrist says today.

While scientists, philosophers and politicians can all suffer from the odd personality defect, for real mental instability you need to look at writers and painters, says Felix Post.

→ Dr Post was initially sceptical, but having looked at the lives of nearly 300 famous men he believes exceptional creativity and psychiatric problems are intertwined. In some way, mental ill health may fuel some forms of creativity, he concludes. (*Guardian*, 30 June 1994)

The feature of the article that struck me was: 'Dr Post was initially sceptical . . .' Following the idea that all features of talk and texts are potentially there to do some kind of business, we can ask why this particular feature is there. What it seems to do is counter the potential criticism that Dr Post is perpetrating stereotypes about madness and creativity. His initial scepticism encourages us to treat his conclusions as factual because they are counter to his original interests.

I have suggested that such features of discourse can be understood by a medical analogy. People can avoid catching a disease such as tuberculosis by being inoculated against it. Perhaps in the same way conversationalists and writers can limit the ease with which their talk and texts can be undermined by doing a *stake inoculation* (Potter, 1996a). Just as you have a jab to prevent the disease, perhaps you can inject a piece of discourse to prevent undermining.

Let me now stand back and highlight two features of the kind of thinking I am using here, two features of the analytic mentality I am working with. First, in common with conversation analysis, discourse analysts are concerned to use evidence from the materials as far as possible rather than basing interpretations on their own prior assumptions about people, society or whatever. In this case, note that the idea that there is a stereotype about madness and creativity is not my own, it is introduced in the text itself. Moreover, the analysis does not depend on this stereotype actually existing, merely that it is invoked as an issue in this text. Note that this does not mean that the analyst expects to be able to free themselves of all their preconceptions, rather it is that analysis is, to an important extent, an interrogation of those expectations (Potter, 1988).

Secondly, note the way I have moved in this analysis between conversational and textual material. Discourse analysts have been much more willing than conversation analysts to combine such materials and have tried to avoid making *a priori* assumptions about differences between the two.

Both talk and texts are treated as oriented to action; *both* orient to issues of stake and may be inoculated against discounting.

'I dunno' as a stake inoculation

So far, then, I have emphasized some background considerations that might help us understand what the 'I dunno' in Extract 1 is doing. One helpful way to continue the analysis is to collect some more examples of a similar kind. More formally, we might think of this as building a corpus for study or even coding of a set of data. Whatever we call it, the goal is to help the analyst see patterns and to highlight different properties of particular constructions. Although some of the initial procedures are superficially similar, the goal is not the content analytic one of providing counts of occurrences of particular kinds of talk within categories.

A brief search for 'I don't know's' through a set of materials taken from relationship counselling sessions provided Extract 4. The extract comes from the start of a long story in which the speaker, Jimmy, is describing a difficult evening in a pub with his wife, Connie. As well as Connie and Jimmy there is a counsellor present. One of the themes in the session is a series of complaints by Jimmy that Connie flirts with other men. At the same time Connie has made a number of suggestions that he is pathologically jealous and prone to seeing harmless sociability as sexual suggestion (for more detail see Edwards, 1995).

(4) *Jimmy:* This ↑one particular night, (0.2)
anyway (0.2) there was uh: (1.2) I didn't-
Connie had made arrangements to ↑meet people.
(1.8)
And I didn't want to. (0.6)
It wasn't any other thing.
(1.6)
A:nd (0.8) we sat in the pub and
we (.) started to discuss =
= >we had a little bit of a row.< (2.0)
in the pub. (0.6)
And arguing about the time. (0.8)
U:m (.) whe:n these people came in. (.)
>It was:< (.) John and Caroline. (1.0)
And then they had- (.)
this other fella Dave.
°With them as well.°
[6 lines omitted]
they all came in the pub anyway. (1.0)
Well (.) Connie sat beside (0.6) Caroline.
And I sat (further back).
So you was (.) you was split between us.
They sat in- on the other side.
(1.0)
[16 lines omitted]
And uh:: (1.0)

1→ Connie had a short skirt on
2→ I don't know. (1.0)
And I knew this- (0.6)
uh ah- maybe I had met him. (1.0) Ye:h. (.)
I musta met Da:ve before. (0.8)
But I'd heard he was a bit of a la:d ( ).
He didn't care: (1.0) who he (0.2) chatted up or (.)
who was in Ireland (.) y'know
those were (unavailable) to chat up with.
(1.0)
So Connie stood up (0.8)
pulled her skirt right up her side (0.6)
and she was looking straight at Da:ve (.)
>°like that°< (0.6)
(DE–JF:C2:S1:10–11)

Let us start by considering Jimmy's description of Connie's skirt length (arrow 1). The description is an especially delicate one, where Jimmy's stake in it is likely to be a particular concern. The problem for Jimmy is that the description could be turned round and used as evidence that he is *precisely* the sort of pathologically jealous guy who can remember every detail of his partner's skirt length. That is, his description might generate problems for him as much as for Connie.

It is immediately after the description of the skirt length that Jimmy produces the 'I don't know' (arrow 2). What might this be doing here? We could treat it as a straightforward report of uncertainty about this feature of the narrative. This would be in line with the cognitive psychological account of such utterances as 'uncertainty markers'. However, another way of interpreting it might consider how the 'I don't know' operates in the interaction. Could a display of uncertainty just at this point head off the potential counter (which has already been raised at length, but in general terms, earlier in the session) that Jimmy was jealously inspecting Connie's clothing, that he was already concerned about it even before the evening was under way? This latter interpretation is consistent with the detail of the sequence. Jimmy provides the description of Connie's skirt length which is part of the picture of *her* flirtatious behaviour, which, in turn, makes *his* own strong reaction more accountable. At the same time the expression of uncertainty works against the idea that *he* is saying this, noticing this, because *he* is pathologically jealous.

Are there any other ways in which we can help adjudicate between different interpretations of 'I don't know'? One approach that discourse analysts have found particularly fruitful has been to look for variability between different versions. Variability is to be expected where people are constructing their talk in different ways to perform different actions – variability in versions can be an important clue to understanding the actions being done. In this case, for example, we can search the materials for other references to Connie's skirt length. If we do that we find the following exchange on the very next page of transcript.

(5) *Connie:* My skirt probably went up to about there. ((gestures with hand on thigh))
Jimmy: ((a sharp intake of breath))
Connie: Maybe a bit shorter. It was done for no- I never looked at that particular bloke when I did it it was my friend commented Oh you're showing o:ff a lot o' leg tonight.
(DE–JF:C2:S1:11)

What is notable is this extract is that Jimmy does not seem to be in any doubt about the precise length of Connie's skirt. I take his sharp, deliberately audible, inbreath as a display of disagreement with Connie's claim about her skirt length; and this is certainly how Connie interprets his breath, for it occasions a modification to the claim. The point, then, is that there is no evidence of Jimmy's cloudy memory – no 'I dunnoness' – here; precision in skirt length now seems to be the order of the day. I suggest that variability of this kind supports the account I have been offering in terms of stake inoculation and is rather hard to fit with a plain vanilla cognitive account where the speaker is merely reporting lack of certainty about their claim.

Let us return now to Martin Bashir's interview with Princess Diana. Can we offer an interpretation of the 'I dunno's' in this passage of talk on the basis of the general considerations about management of stake and interest and the specific examples we have considered so far? Can we see these 'I dunno's' as stake inoculations?

The first question to ask is: do the participants orient to a potential issue of stake? It is not hard to find such an issue. A claim widely made in newspaper reports was that the Princess used Andrew Morton's book as a device to get back at Prince Charles, her husband. This issue was raised again in much of the newspaper coverage of the royal interview, and it is alluded to elsewhere in the interview itself. More directly, the very fact that Bashir chooses to focus upon a number of questions on her motives for cooperating with Andrew Morton, and the nature of that cooperation, shows this to be considered to be consequential.

The second question to ask is: can 'I dunno' potentially act as a stake inoculation? I suggest that the placement of the 'I dunno's' in the Princess's talk is precisely where the issue of motive is most acute. For the Princess to accept that the book was part of a planned and strategic campaign to present a particular view of the royal marriage and her role in it would be potentially culpable. The 'I dunno's' present her as not sure of the role of the book, perhaps thinking it fully over for the first time. This is combined with the answer that displays her motive as not a selfish or small-minded one, but one of (rather vaguely) promoting sisterly solidarity. The vagueness here is rather neatly in tune with both the 'on the hoof' quality presented by the 'I dunno's'; and the non-verbal finessing of the phrase with a look into the distance as though searching for the answer (in the first instance), and then shaking her head as though it is a difficult question which she did not have a ready or clear answer for (in the second instance).

This is by no means a definitive account of the role of 'I dunno' in Extract 1. However, what I have tried to do is show some of the procedures that can help build an interpretation of a piece of discourse, and the mentality that goes with such analysis. Let me list some of these features.

Themes in the analysis of discourse

This chapter has attempted to overview some of the issues that arise when analysing discourse. Developing skills in such analysis is best characterized as developing a particular mentality rather than following a preformed recipe. DA is more inductive than hypothetico-deductive; generally work starts with a setting or particular discursive phenomenon rather than a preformulated hypothesis. The focus is on texts and talk as social practices in their own right. Part of DA may involve coding a set of materials, but this is an analytic preliminary used to make the quantity of materials more manageable rather than a procedure that performs the analysis itself. There is nothing sacred about such codings and extracts are often freely excluded and included in the course of some research.

DA follows the conversation analytic assumption that any order of detail in talk and text is potentially consequential for interaction, and for that reason high-quality transcripts are used in conjunction with tape recordings. In addition, discourse analytic research generally avoids trading on analysts' prior assumptions about what might be called ethnographic particulars (e.g. participants' status, the nature of the context, the goals of the participants), preferring to see these as things that are worked up, attended to and made relevant in interaction rather than being external determinants.

DA does not use talk and texts as a pathway to underlying cognitions; indeed, DA resolutely steers clear of cognitive reduction, instead treating purportedly cognitive phenomena as parts of social practices. Such discursive psychology has focused on the way participants invoke stake and interest to understand and undercut accounts, and how such undercutting may be resisted by performing actions via accounts that are constructed as factual.

In this chapter I attempted to illustrate these themes by way of a discussion of 'I dunno' and 'I don't know'. I have considered only a small number of examples. However, I hope that the insights might be more general. Let me end with an extract from the US comedy sitcom *Friends*. Even with my minimal, cleaned-up transcription I think we can start to see the way the humour in the sequence depends on the sorts of features of 'I don't know' discussed above. The sequence starts with Ross talking to a psychologist, Rodge, about his ex wife.

(6) *Ross:* You see that's where you're wrong! Why would I marry her if I thought on any level that she was a lesbian?

→ *Rodge:* I don't know. ((shrugs)) Maybe you wanted your marriage to fail. ((laughs))
Ross: Why, why, why would I, why, why, why.
→ *Rodge:* I don't know. Maybe . . . Maybe low self esteem, maybe to compensate for overshadowing a sibling. Maybe you w-
Monica: W- w- wait. Go back to that sibling thing.
→ *Rodge:* I don't know. ((shrugs)) It's conceivable that you wanted to sabotage your marriage so the sibling would feel less like a failure in the eyes of the parents.
Ross: Tchow! That's, that's ridiculous. I don't feel guilty for her failures.
(*The One with the Boobies*, Channel 4, 27 June 1996 – Ross is Monica's brother, Rodge is a psychologist boyfriend of Ross and Monica's friend.

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