Over the past few decades new ways of conceiving the relation between people, practices and institutions have been developed, enabling an understanding of human conduct in complex situations that is distinctive from traditional psychological and sociological conceptions. This distinctiveness is derived from a sophisticated analytic approach to social action which combines conversation analysis with the fresh treatment of epistemology, mind, cognition and personality developed in discursive psychology. This volume is the first to showcase and promote this new method of discursive research in practice. Featuring contributions from a range of international academics, both pioneers in the field and exciting new researchers, this book illustrates an approach to social science issues that cuts across the traditional disciplinary divisions to provide a rich participant-based understanding of action.

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Discursive Research in Practice

New Approaches to Psychology and Interaction

Edited by
Alexa Hepburn and Sally Wiggins
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Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to various people and organisations for practical, intellectual and psychological support. First and foremost, we would like to thank our contributors both for their sustained efforts in producing their excellent chapters to various deadlines, and for their speedy responses to our comments and suggestions. The Discourse and Rhetoric Group at Loughborough University provides a stimulating intellectual context, in particular, Derek Edwards and Elizabeth Stokoe are inspirational friends and colleagues. We would also like to thank Jonathan Potter for his helpful comments on our own chapters. Finally, thanks to Sarah Caro and Cambridge University Press for commissioning the book.
There has been a quiet revolution in the social sciences. Over the past few decades new ways of working and new ways of conceiving the relation between people, practices and institutions have been developed. These have started to make possible an understanding of human conduct in complex situations that is distinct from the traditional conceptions offered by disciplines such as psychology and sociology. This distinctiveness is derived from the sophisticated analytic approach to social action that has been developed by conversation analysis combined with the fresh treatment of mind, cognition and personality developed in discursive psychology. Both of these approaches work with the displayed perspectives of participants in interaction, perspectives embodied in people’s constructions and orientations. In addition, this research has exploited the new recording technology and representational forms that enable it to engage more immediately with human practices; that is, to study ‘the world as it happens’ (Boden, 1990) instead of working through the mediation of interviews, questionnaires or ethnographic field notes. This work offers a sophisticated and theoretically nuanced empiricism that focuses on discourse as the central medium for action, psychology and understanding.

This book brings together researchers who have been doing discourse research in this new tradition. It features well-known contributors, some of them pioneers in their field, as well as exciting new researchers who are still early in their careers. Most come from the fields of discursive psychology and conversation analysis. It provides a range of analyses, which illustrate and exemplify new ways in which institutional and everyday settings can be researched and understood, as well as showing how key psychological topics can be reworked. All of the contributors work with direct records of interaction from various institutional and everyday settings. These are highly varied, and include: family conversations with young children; mundane telephone calls; therapeutic and medical sessions; psychological experiments; market research focus groups; sex offender therapy; political speeches and emails; relationship
counselling; psychiatric assessment for gender reassignment; school group evaluation and school counselling sessions; therapy for autistic children; and a child protection helpline. Taken together, the chapters illustrate an approach to social science issues that cuts across the traditional disciplinary divisions to provide a rich participant-based understanding of action.

In this opening chapter we will set this work in context, outlining developments in ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and discursive psychology, and distinguishing those developments from traditions of discourse work that make different assumptions.

Talking organisations

Conversation analysis

Conversation analysis (occasionally CA) originated in the 1960s in the lectures of Harvey Sacks (now published as Sacks, 1992). It was refined and rethought with his colleagues Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. Conversation analysis offers an approach to analysis that combines a focus on the systemic nature of conversation and the way it is heard and understood by its participants. CA highlights three key elements of conversation:

1. Talk is a medium of action. Central to conversation analysis is the notion that any utterance can be examined for the action that it performs. This focus on action (and on the way actions are parts of broader practices) is in contrast to traditional linguistic approaches where talk is treated in terms of sentences or similar structures.

2. Actions done in talk are both context-dependent and context-renewing. That is, any action is oriented to the immediately prior turns of talk, and the action done in the current turn of talk provides a context for what comes next. Hence CA has a particular focus on sequences of action, which are often organised around paired actions such as invitations and acceptances, questions and answers, or assessments and second assessments.

3. In producing a next action, a speaker displays their understanding of the prior action. For example, if an invitation is issued by a speaker, the recipient not only accepts (or declines) the invitation, but *in doing one of these acts* (or relevant alternatives) shows that they have understood what has been issued *as* an invitation. This, in turn, provides further opportunities for the issuing speaker to acknowledge or initiate repair of a problem. This turn by turn display
of understanding is crucial, both for participants, as it allows them to coordinate their actions, and for analysts, as it allows them to ground their claims in participants’ own understandings.

In the thirty years since the publication of the foundational turn-taking paper (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974) conversation analysis has resulted in a cumulative set of studies that map out some of the systemic features of the organisation of interaction – the very ‘structures of social action’ (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984) that provide the building blocks for social life. The power of these structures is that they are not brittle templates that must be followed; rather, they are normative. If an invitation is not followed by an acceptance or refusal (or some other normatively relevant action) this may occasion possible inferences (the recipient has not heard, is rude, is embarrassed or some other contextually relevant possibility).

Sacks worked on a range of materials from settings such as suicide-prevention lines and therapy groups. His focus was on the basic conversational phenomena – he was less concerned with how these conversations were refined in, or did the work of, institutions. The first major work that explicitly and systematically applied conversation analysis to institutional materials was Atkinson and Drew’s (1979) study of courtroom interaction. This considered the way the practices that make up the work of the courts are achieved, for example, how the constraints of cross-examination questions necessitate more than one turn to generate an accusation, and how witnesses produce different kinds of defences in the sequential positions before and after the blaming is completed.

Although a series of studies on various topic areas was produced in the intervening time it was not for another decade until conversation analytic work on institutional interaction came to major prominence in four collections (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992; Watson and Seiler, 1992; and particularly Boden and Zimmerman, 1991, and Drew and Heritage, 1992a). Taken together, and despite some differences, this work revolutionises the way what it is to be an institution can be understood. In particular, it offers an alternative to the more common ‘container’ view of institutions, which treats them as broad societal boxes within which interpersonal actions take place in a way that is somewhat determined by features of the institutional box. At the same time it offers a radically different treatment of the role of broad social categories such as race, class and gender that sociologists have often taken to be central to the asymmetries of social institutions. Such categories are often a major focus of Critical Discourse Analysis (discussed below).
The four collections on institutional interaction offered different arguments against the ‘container’ view of institutions. To better comprehend the radical direction of these four collections, we can focus on the arguments presented by Schegloff (1992). Schegloff presents two key challenges that illustrate the subtlety and complexity of addressing institutions in this way, one focused on the issue of relevance and one on the issue of procedural consequentiality. The argument about relevance starts with the observation that there is a wide range of alternative categorizations available for persons and settings. Put at its simplest, even though the analyst may have some judgements about what categorizations are appropriate or correct the key interactional issue is what categorizations are treated as relevant by the participants. Thus, whether a person is female, or Scottish, or a teacher is not a sufficient warrant for the analysts to invoke that person’s membership of these categories (or any of the many other categories that the person could potentially occupy) to explain their utterances. The key issue is not abstract descriptive adequacy, but practical relevance to the interactional business at hand.

Schegloff suggests that there are two broad approaches to the problem of relevance. One can be described as positivist and requires that the success of a particular categorisation be assessed by statistical or historical methods, perhaps supplemented by interpretation on the basis of the appropriate theory. This approach works independently of participants’ use of and/or orientation to the terms. The other approach is central to the conceptualisation of institutions and categories in conversation analysis. In this approach the social science categorisations are grounded in the conduct of the participants and in particular in the categorisations and orientations that they are themselves using. As Schegloff (1992) puts it, it is not just that social scientists find people ‘to be characterizable as “president/assistant,” “chicano/black,” as “professor/student,” etc. but that for them, at that moment, those are terms relevant for producing and interpreting conduct in the interaction’ (p. 109).

The point, then, for Schegloff is not that these categories do not matter – they do. The problem is showing analytically that some features of the structure or some categories are what the participants themselves are orienting to. This will involve showing ‘how the parties are embodying for one another the relevancies of the interaction and are thereby producing the social structure’ (p. 110, italics in original).

The problem of procedural consequentiality comes into play when some category or social structure has been shown to be relevant. The
point is that even if some category or structure is oriented to as relevant, that does not mean that it is procedurally consequential for the unfolding interaction. Thus if a classroom context, say, is relevant for the parties to an interaction, that does not mean that it has specific consequences for the content or trajectory or character of the interaction. What needs to be established is the mechanism by which the context (as understood) is consequential for the ongoing interaction.

For example, if it is thought that some style of question asking is central to classroom teaching, the analytic challenge is to show how this style is produced institutionally rather than being a questioning style that is common elsewhere and which has simply been drawn in the classroom setting. What this challenge encourages is careful comparative work. It is easy to assume that some interactional practices in an institutional setting are a product of that setting when a broader study might show that these practices are more generic.

**Talk at work**

Although Schegloff’s discussion of social organisation can seem more negative than positive it paves the way for a broader conversation analytic approach to institutions. Drew and Heritage (1992b) highlighted three features of institutions that would provide a framework for understanding the contribution of conversation analysis.

1. **Goal orientation.** In institutional settings at least some of the participants are oriented to basic goals or tasks. These can be clear cut and relatively consensual (such as in calls to emergency services) or ill defined and fluid (such as health visits to new mothers). There are often differences between the orientations of lay and institutional participants (the patient and doctor, for example).

2. **Interactional constraints.** Different institutional settings generate formal and informal constraints on conduct. Note that these can be inhibiting or promoting. In doctor–patient settings some talk is discouraged and some is encouraged.

3. **Inferential frameworks.** In institutional settings the ‘inferential’ properties of actions may be different. For example, withholding an expression of sympathy might be treated as disaffiliative in a mundane setting such as a phone call between friends but not treated as such in a television news interview (e.g. Clayman and Heritage, 2002); in contrast, inconsequent-seeming remarks in a chat between friends might be treated as critical or threatening in some institutional contexts (e.g. Heritage and Sefi, 1992).
Overall, they noted that interaction in institutional settings often involves both a restriction of what happens elsewhere and also a refinement. Certain kinds of activities and certain sorts of responses drop out, but basic institutional activities such as courtroom cross-examination, medical consultation or news interviewing involve a refinement of more basic mundane practices (cf. Drew, 1992; Peräkylä, 1995; Clayman and Heritage, 2002).

In the time since the publication of the Drew and Heritage (1992a) volume there has been a large amount of work on interaction in institutional settings. This has increasingly refined the alternative to the container view of institutions, highlighting a range of different levels at which the operation of institutionality can be revealed. Many of the themes in this work will be picked up in the chapters collected here.

Talking cognition

Discursive psychology

At around the same time that conversation analysts were offering this reworking of the nature of social institutions discursive psychology (sometimes DP) offered what can now be seen as a parallel reworking of the nature of psychology and, in particular, the status of cognition. Just as CA moved researchers away from the idea that institutions are separate entities that have some kind of determinist effect on interaction, so DP moved researchers away from the idea that cognition is a separate mental space that has a determinate effect on action (Potter, 1998). It criticised the assumptions of the kind of cognitivism which assumes that the explanation of human conduct is dependent on the understanding of prior and underlying cognitive processes and entities. In these traditions of work action is treated in a more constitutive than dependent relationship to either the institution or the cognition. Indeed, both perspectives provide a critical stance in relation to the reified and solidified versions of institutions and cognitions.

Edwards and Potter’s (1992) volume Discursive psychology set out the foundations of the discursive psychological programme of work by way of a series of studies that reworked classic studies in cognitive psychology. For example, they examined the way Ulrich Neisser had used the testimony of John Dean to the Senate Committee investigating the Watergate break (ultimately crucial in the impeachment of President Nixon) as a basis for developing a theory of memory. They argued that by treating Dean’s testimony as a product of cognitive processes (different kinds of memory) Neisser was failing to appreciate the practical
role of different versions of what had happened as Dean dealt with cross-examination. They show how he imposes a cognitivist construction on Dean’s testimony by treating it as determined by his memory and failing to attend to conversational and institutional pragmatics. In discursive psychology cognition is not the thing that explains interaction; rather, in a discursive psychological analysis we can see how versions of mind (memories, traits and attitudes) come to be produced for the purposes of action.

**Core principles of discursive psychology**

Discursive psychology works with three fundamental principles in its approach to discourse (Potter and Edwards, 2001).

1. **Action orientation.** As in CA, discourse is treated as primary means through which actions are done and interaction is coordinated. Actions are seen as typically embedded in broader practices. DP does not assume that there will be a one-to-one relationship between discrete acts and discrete verbs. Rather, DP has had a particular focus on the way actions are done indirectly through different kinds of descriptions.

2. **Situation.** DP treats discourse as situated in three complementary senses. First, it is organised sequentially in the way emphasised by conversation analysis, such that the primary environment for any utterance is the immediately prior utterance, and the new utterance sets up (although does not determine) what comes next. Second, discourse is situated institutionally, such that institutional identities (therapist and patient, perhaps) and tasks (managing problems, offering advice) will be relevant to what takes place. Third, discourse is situated rhetorically, such that any description can be inspected for how it counters relevant alternative descriptions (often, but by no means always, from the immediately prior talk).

3. **Construction.** DP treats discourse as both constructed and constructive. Discourse is constructed from a variety of different resources (words, categories, rhetorical commonplaces, interpretative repertoires). Discourse is constructive of different versions of the world, including versions of actions, events, histories, social structures and organisations, psychological characteristics and phenomenological experiences. DP studies both the actions done with these constructions (how a person uses a version of the traffic on the motorway to account for missing a meeting) and the way these constructions are built to be stable, objective and independent of the speaker.
There is a considerable overlap of these DP principles and the basic assumptions of conversation analysis. This is not surprising as discursive psychology was itself heavily influenced by work in conversation analysis. Moreover, some of the key alternative sources for the development of DP (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987) were themselves somewhat influenced by CA. And all of this work was somewhat influenced by ethnomethodology which played a powerful role in the inception of conversation analysis.

One of the achievements of discursive psychology has been to move away from the individualist and cognitivist assumptions of recent psychology. For discursive psychologists, what people say is not taken to represent the contents of their mind (what they are really thinking) or reality (what really happened); rather things such as mind and reality are seen as first and foremost resources for participants in dialogue – which also makes them a useful resource for the analyst. DP has therefore focused on broadly ‘psychological’ topics such as cognition and emotions (Edwards, 1997, 1999; Locke and Edwards, 2003; Potter and Hepburn, 2003), attitudes and evaluations (Potter, 1996, 1998a; Puchta and Potter, 2002; Wiggins and Potter, 2003), racism and prejudice (Buttny, 1999; Edwards, 2005; LeCouteur, Rapley and Augoustinos, 2001), and memories and motives (e.g. Edwards and Potter, 1992). In doing so, it has offered an alternative to traditional psychological approaches to these topics, and also to how we theorise ‘psychology’. Psychological concepts are treated in DP not as something we have or we are, but as resources for action. Psychology becomes more interactionally focused, dynamic and culturally specific as a result.

Themes in discursive psychology

Work in discursive psychology has developed around a number of different themes. These are cross-cutting, but it is useful to highlight some of their differences. Edwards (2004) picks out three themes.

1. Respecification and critique. Respecification involves the reworking of topics from cognitive psychology and social cognition from a discourse perspective. For example, the core social cognitive notion of script has been reworked in DP by considering the way descriptions of actions and events can produce them as standard and orderly (Edwards, 1994). Note that respecification is not intended in DP to just provide a different version of the same objects – rather it changes the whole perspective from a cognitive one to a constructed and action-oriented one. In many cases the coherence of the cognitive object will simply dissolve.
2. The psychological thesaurus. One of the key aims of DP is to explore the working of common sense, including the use of categories that would conventionally be treated as psychological. This includes the range of words for emotional and mental states such as remember, think, upset, angry and so on as well as the huge range of available idiomatic and metaphorical constructions – bear in mind, boiling, ragged and so on. Several of the studies collected in this volume address terms from the psychological thesaurus.

3. Management of psychological business. A major topic in DP since its inception has been the often implicit management of psychological themes. How are matters such as agency, doubt, prejudice and emotional investment displayed, built up or undermined through descriptions of actions, events or circumstances?

In addition to these three basic DP themes, some of the contributors to the current collection will pick up a newly emerging topic which is the discursive psychology of institutions (Edwards and Potter, 2001; Potter, 2005). Social psychology has traditionally had little interest in the specifics of social institutions, being focused instead on the operation of generic trans-historical social processes (Gergen, 1982). In contrast, DP has started to ask the question of how particular institutions and organisations – therapy sessions, classroom teaching, police interrogation – are done through the use of specific ‘psychological’ business. DP studies with this focus may ask how particular psychological notions and orientations are drawn on to do the work of the institution.

This emerging theme in DP builds on the ground-breaking work done by conversation analysts and adds a particular focus on the organisation and refinement of practices or issues that have more traditionally been understood as psychological. Issues of knowledge, stance, understanding, blame, guilt and responsibility are threaded through everyday situations and are at the core of many institutions. DP focuses on the way these issues are practically managed in interaction.

Differences between conversation analysis and discursive psychology

As we have already indicated discursive psychology has drawn heavily on the theoretical ideas and analytic approach of conversation analysis. Sacks’ (1992) early work not only laid the foundations for conversation analysis it also developed a sophisticated interactional approach to the relationship between utterances and psychological states which is, to
some extent, a forerunner of modern discursive psychology. However, it
is worth briefly considering three areas of potential tension between DP
and CA.

First, DP developed a systematic approach to the relation between the
way descriptions are assembled and the actions they are involved in. This
drew as much on developments in the sociology of science and
broader constructionist ideas as specifically CA work (see Potter, 1996,
for an overview). For example, Edwards (1995, 1997) studied the way
constructions of anger in relationship counselling can play a role in
assigning problems to one of the partners, nominating them as the
person who needs the therapy. Constructions of this kind are mutually
inferential – people construct versions of their memories, feelings and
cognitive states as part of establishing the nature of events or settings;
and they construct versions of events or settings as part of establishing
the nature of feelings or cognitive states. In addition, as we have noted
DP draws on the rhetorical tradition of Billig (1996). This shows how
descriptions are put together to counter actual or potential alternatives.
DP is distinctive from other constructionist traditions (and closer to
CA) in its focus on the business of constructing versions in talk and
texts, and its emphasis on the way constructions are parts of situated
practices. Conversation analysts have been less focused on construc-
tionist themes of this kind (although they are not necessarily incon-
sistent with CA work).

A second area of potential contrast involves the way cognition is
conceptualised. DP is a systematically non-cognitivist approach. It puts
aside questions of the existence of cognitive entities and processes
(technical or everyday) in favour of a focus on how cognitive entities are
constructed in and for interactional practices. It can study ‘upset’ in a
therapy session, for example, without trying to answer the question of
whether the word ‘upset’ has an inner referent, and without trying to
assess whether a ‘display’ of upset is ‘authentic’ or ‘invented’. Nor is
such a study required to decide on the reality of distinctions between,
say, surface and depth psychology prior to analysis. These things can be
treated as topics for study in their own right. For the most part CA has
also been an enterprise that avoids cognitivist assumptions. However, at
times CA researchers have had a more ambivalent approach to cogni-
tion. Sometimes this has involved an attempt to connect interactional
phenomena to putative mental objects or at least to suggest the coher-
ence of such a programme (Drew, 2005; Kitzinger, 2006; Schegloff,
2006). For an overview of these issues see the different papers in te
Molder and Potter (2005) and the debate between Coulter (1999) and
A third major area of contrast relates to the conversation analytic focus on turn-taking and sequence organisation. DP has tended to focus on participants’ formulations and categories, and has picked up on issues of turn organisation and sequential placement in a less thoroughgoing way. Developing a more rigorous conversation analytic approach will allow further insights into the organisation and sequential placement of particular phenomena that are generated through a corpus of materials, and their relationship to constructions of mind and world. This will facilitate the further development of both discursive psychology and conversation analysis.

**Discursive psychology and discourse analysis**

Discursive psychology emerged out of a particular strand of discourse analytic work. It will help situate the contributions to this volume if we discuss this work and its relationship to DP as well its relationship to CA and the rather different tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This is a major challenge to understanding the disciplinary geography in this somewhat contested terrain – the best we can do is highlight some of the main features of interest and point the reader to some paths that might lead to higher ground.

Discursive psychology was developed from a particular strand of discourse work that was laid out in Potter and Wetherell (1987). They set out the fundamentals of a style of work that offered a new way of conceptualising the topic of social psychology and an alternative method of analysis to the hegemony of experiments and surveys. It drew on both conversation analytic and post-structural thinking, as well as ideas from the sociology of scientific knowledge. All of this potential confusion was disciplined by taking as its major focus discourse – talk and texts – and in particular the way discourse is embedded in and contributes to social practices. It laid down many of the features later refined in discursive psychology. Two areas of difference are worth considering because they have been consequential in subsequent work.

First, Potter and Wetherell (1987) had a major interest in identifying the organised resources that underlie and sustain interaction. Of course, linguists have highlighted the role of individual lexical items. Sacks (1992) in his early work highlighted the role of membership categories, and this has been a tradition recently revived by ethnomethodologists (e.g. Hester and Eglin, 1997). Billig (1996) emphasised the importance of rhetorical commonplaces as resources for action. Building on the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), Potter and Wetherell developed the notion of interpretative repertoires. These are clusters of terms...
organised around a central metaphor, often used with grammatical regularity. They can be flexibly drawn on to perform particular actions (see Edley, 2001).

For example, in their major study of racist discourse in New Zealand Wetherell and Potter (1992) focused on ‘culture’ in a way different from previous anthropology and social psychology. They did not treat culture as a feature of the lifestyle, rituals and world view of Maoris; nor did they treat it as a mental stereotype organising the information processing of the Pākehā (White, European New Zealanders). Instead, they identified two interpretative repertoires through which culture was flexibly and locally constructed to perform different activities. On the one hand, the Culture-as-Heritage repertoire was used to build culture as an anti-quated inheritance that should be treasured but requires protection from the rigours of the ‘modern world’. On the other, the Culture-as-Therapy repertoire constructed culture as a psychological requirement that would stop Maori becoming rootless and mentally unstable. Wetherell and Potter (1992) note that these repertoires show a sensitivity to difference organised around social relations rather than genetics, and are thus free of many of the connotations of racism. Yet they can be powerfully used (in newspapers, parliamentary debates and everyday talk) to attack Maori political movements and undercut the legitimacy of Maori claims.

The repertoire notion offered a picture of complex, historically developed organisations of ideas that could be identified through research, and yet were flexible enough that they could be drawn on and reworked in the vagaries of practice. In this way, they have some advantages over some neo-Foucauldian notions of discourse (Parker, 2002) that are more brittle and tectonic. Nevertheless, as Wooffitt (2005b) has suggested, the notion fails to accommodate the sheer complexity of human conduct. Moreover, there are major issues in how interpretative repertoires can be reliably and accountably identified in a specific corpus of materials. There are very real debates here, illustrated in the influential exchange between Schegloff (1997) and Wetherell (1998).

The second area of difference between Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) conception of discourse analysis and the later discursive psychology concerns the place of open-ended interviews in the generation of analytic materials. Potter and Wetherell draw on some work using naturalistic materials, but much of their discussion and the majority of the very large body of studies using interpretative repertoires have used open-ended interviews (e.g., Lawes, 1999; Liefooghe, 2003; Lumme-Sandt et al., 2000). Discursive psychology is distinct from the earlier tradition of discourse analysis in almost completely abandoning open-ended interviews as a research method. In contrast, from its very
beginnings conversation analysis has been conducted on the basis of a critique of sociological and anthropological methods which has led to an exclusive focus on naturalistic materials. We will have more to say on this topic below.

Conversation analysis, discursive psychology and Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis is a much broader collection of approaches than either conversation analysis or discursive psychology (although there is some variation of assumptions within both). In their authoritative overview, for example, Fairclough and Wodak (1997) include French Discourse Analysis, Critical Linguistics, Social Semiotics, Socio-cognitive studies and the Duisburg School amongst others. One thing that collects these approaches together is a focus on social critique. Often this involves an interest in the ideologies and discourses that are treated as underpinning different forms of talk and text and sustaining relations of inequality. However, social critique in some form is not unique to these approaches. Work in both conversation analysis and discursive psychology has been involved with critical and political issues, such as the oppression of minority groups (see, e.g., Kitzinger, 2005; Sneijder and te Molder, 2005). Indeed, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) suggest that discursive psychology satisfies many of the broader defining characteristics of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) while eschewing the title. And there is a judgement to be had about whether political and critical analysis is something to be earned by results or something that should be celebrated and asserted in the very name of a programme of work (see Hammersley, 1997).

However, our aim here is not to provide an assessment of CDA but to indicate some general areas of difference from the style of work included in the current volume. Even with the heterogeneity of CDA three areas can be highlighted: the role of linguistics, the theorising of context and the understanding of discourse and discourse practices. We will take them in turn.

CDA draws upon fields as diverse as Foucauldian discourse theory and cognitive psychology; nevertheless, most strands start with some form of linguistic analysis, often Halliday’s functional grammar. Although the work collected here is concerned with discourse, it is cautious about linguistic analysis and the associated linguistic categories for the analysis of that discourse. Instead, the focus is on social practices, and how the categories that are used in understanding those practices are analytically connected to the participants’ orientations and displayed understandings.
Linguistic analysis, even functional linguistics in the Halliday tradition, has not started with practices and how words and sequences are involved in those practices. Instead it has worked with textual and lexical organisations and processes (nominalisation, subject deletion).

With respect to theorising context this is an area where there have been some heated debates between conversation analysts and others. Schegloff’s influential (1997) paper on text and context is often seen as directed at some CDA work. He highlights the challenge that issues of relevance and procedural consequentiality pose for work that opts to start with a historical or sociological account of context, and hopes to explain discourse practices by reference to that account. CA and DP work is particularly focused on the way context is a live issue for participants, and an issue that is locally and fluidly managed through various means (including formulations of relevant contextual particulars). Note that Schegloff is not suggesting that such work cannot be done, nor that it is uninteresting or unimportant; he is, however, highlighting the complexity of the analytic tasks that are involved.

There is a difference of emphasis between CDA and the work collected here on the issue of discourse practices. Broadly, CDA tends to adopt functional analyses that attempt to connect textual structures to social structures; DP and CA are concerned with activities done through talk and texts, and the way these may be coordinated in particular practices, and in turn, the way they constitute broader institutional organisations. This difference is reflected in differences in the way discourse is conceptualised. In CDA discourse is typically treated as a thing, something that can be counted. Thus in a doctor–patient interaction there can be a move between ‘the discourse of medicine’ and ‘the discourse of counselling’ (e.g., Fairclough, 1995) and much of the explanatory purchase of CDA comes from the structured nature of these organisations, both within each one and between them. In contrast, CA and DP work is more likely to see such textual organisations as a by-product of the way activities are done within settings. These are difficult issues, and we are not attempting to resolve them here. The key point to note is that the papers in the current collection focus on practices within settings and are not attempting to explain those practices in terms of broader discourse structures in the manner of CDA.

**Naturalistic materials and empirical methods**

Up to now we have laid out some of the features shared by the different contributions to this volume as well as considering some of the ways they are distinct from alternative perspectives such as Critical Discourse
Analysis. At the start we noted that one of the features of this work is that it has exploited new recording technologies and forms of representational practice that allow it to engage with human practices in all their detail. Looked at another way, it has moved away from the kinds of standard data-generation procedures that are common elsewhere in the social sciences, including in discourse work in sociology, anthropology and social psychology. In particular it has avoided the use of both interviews and the ethnographic observation-and-field-note approaches common in qualitative research. One key reason for this focus on naturalistic materials is that work in discourse and conversation analysis sees what Goffman (1983) called the interaction order as a foundational way of accessing how people live their lives. Interviews and other researcher-generated techniques such as questionnaires disrupt this order in complex and hard-to-identify ways. Ethnographic observation is very hard to conduct at a level of granularity that captures its operation. We will make some brief comments on the operation of interviews and basic issues that arise in conceptualising and collecting naturalistic materials.

**Open-ended interviews**

The style of discourse analysis laid out in Potter and Wetherell (1987) and exemplified in work by Billig (1992) and others used some form of open-ended interview as its principal data-generation technique. More recently, the style of critical discourse work that has addressed issues of subjectivity and neo-liberalism using a psychodynamic meta-theory has also been based almost exclusively on open-ended interviews (e.g. Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

Potter and Hepburn (2005a) summarise some of the problems with the use of open-ended interviews. They note that they are often used in ways that wipe out many of their interactional features (by focusing on extracts from participants’ ‘answers’ and using forms of transcript which wipe out many of the elements of talk that conversation analysts have shown to be live for participants). Even when more care is paid to these features interviews present challenging difficulties. It is very hard to disentangle the social science agendas that are imported with the question construction, terminology and the whole set-up of the interview. Both interviewer and interviewee move between complex and sometimes indistinct footing positions. For example, participants are often recruited as members of social categories (a schoolteacher, say), but they may position their talk in various complex ways with respect to that category membership. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) highlight a
range of difficulties of this kind. There are also complex and hard-to-analyse issues with respect to the stake or interest (Potter, 1996) that each party may show in what they are saying.

More generally, open-ended interviews are used with the assumption that they will access some competence or resources that underlie practices in other settings, or can access cognitive notions such as beliefs or events and actions that happened elsewhere. Conversation analysts and discursive psychologists have preferred to work from actual records of conduct rather than work via interviews. Given that researchers have demonstrated the possibility of working with records, and given the sorts of difficulties with interviews that have been highlighted, the onus is more with interview researchers to show the value of continuing to base their work on these instruments.

**Naturalistic data**

There are a further set of issues about natural and contrived data (Speer, 2002) and in particular whether researchers are offering a new positivism that underplays the active role of the researcher in the data-collection and analytic process. It is useful to make some distinctions here. First, we have referred to naturalistic rather than natural data to highlight cautions about its status. Researchers are often involved in the generation of such data (recruiting participants, training them to use recording equipment, working through ethics procedures). However, this is a different order of involvement than the open-ended interview, say, where the data is fashioned by direct interaction with the researcher. Second, although we can consider interview interaction to be fashioned by the researcher it is, nonetheless, possible to naturalise it. That is, it can be studied as research interview interaction, considering, for example, how it differs or does not from news interview interaction or from focus group interaction and so on. This tradition of work includes Lee and Roth (2004), Rapley (2001), Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) and several of the contributions to van den Berg et al. (2003). This is, in turn, part of the broader tradition of work on interaction in research settings (overviewed in the chapter by Potter and Puchta below).

Research using naturalistic records faces issues that are traditionally collected together with the notion of ‘reactivity’ (the participants’ activities being ‘influenced’ by the recording process). Without trivialising this issue there are a number of responses. First, a period of acclimatisation can be used to let participants become familiar with the recording process. Moreover, they are often quite unconcerned with issues that are of research interest, but much more focused on issues that
are not relevant (cursing, say, or the disclosing of intimate information). Second, recording technology is a pervasive and often unremarkable feature of people’s lives in the West – people use video cameras and memo recorders for all kinds of things, and are often told that their talk is to be recorded for training purposes when they phone a big organisation. Third, recording is often done in situations where there are important and omnipresent practical goals – in courtrooms, police interrogations, NSPCC calls, psychotherapy and so on. The research process is unlikely to make much difference here – all parties will be focused on other issues.

This book records a tradition of work where a new kind of empiricism is being developed. This uses sophisticated theories of interaction derived from ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, combined with a discursive stance that avoids the cognitivism of more traditional work. This apparatus is able to work with high quality digital records of people acting and interacting in everyday and institutional settings, which can be stored, replayed, cut and pasted, anonymised, coded and searched. These records can be combined with Jeffersonian transcription, which captures talk as it is hearably relevant to the participants. This is the basis for a science of what people do that goes beyond a range of contemporary social science traditions and distinctions. In some sense, it is the start of a new way of doing social research. For the rest of this chapter we will overview the content of the book and highlight the ways in which it exemplifies this research agenda.

Talking psychology Part I of this book sets out one of the major focuses of discursive psychology, with all five chapters advocating an action-orientated approach to what have traditionally been characterised as inner states. A major focus for discursive psychologists has been the role of dispositional formulations, which present actions as a product of features of individuals (their personality, views or moral shortcomings). Derek Edwards has been particularly active in highlighting the interactional usefulness that arises from being able to disclaim or refer to one’s own or another’s inner states and subjective biases. He has also shown the ways that these can be contrasted with what he terms ‘script formulations’, which present actions as normal, standard or expected (e.g. Edwards, 1994, 1997). Script formulations are a basic tool used by people when constructing and stabilising particular versions of social order. It is possible to see Edwards’ chapter (Chapter 2) in this collection as both an extension and a refinement of his earlier work.

Using data from a variety of sources, Edwards builds an increasingly sophisticated project focused on managing dispositions, in particular on
the way different types of subjective investments can be claimed or denied in different types of interaction. He develops the term ‘counter dispositionals’ to describe devices that manage the subjectivity of an account, and outlines two ways that dispositions can be managed – firstly, to produce oneself as a normal person, not possessing a disposition to exaggerate, embellish or make unwarranted inferences. This can involve the use of various practices such as ‘extreme case formulations’ (Pomerantz, 1986), which deploy formulations that include various types of extremity (e.g. ‘you always say that’, ‘I never win’). Edwards (2000) noted that this can create problems for speakers as it leaves them open to accusations of subjective bias, of being disposed to exaggerate. He showed how speakers can counter this hearing by deploying strategies such as softening or ironising an extreme formulation.

The second way of handling subjectivity involves constructing oneself as not the kind of person who would normally make negative or biased assessments, or as someone forced to reconceptualise (usually by some force of events or circumstances) what they previously thought. A classic example is the types of racist disclaimers that Potter and Wetherell (1987) identified – ‘I’m not a racist, but . . .’ where the remainder of the turn is devoted to outlining practical reasons why racial equality cannot be achieved – it is a conclusion reluctantly arrived at by someone not disposed to conclude that kind of thing. This type of disclaiming is what Edwards terms a ‘counter dispositional’ – concluding something despite one’s own disposition to believe the opposite. It also relates to Potter’s (1996) notion of ‘stake inoculation’, which refers to a phrase designed to inoculate the speaker from being heard as having a stake or investment in the matter at hand.

The second broad way of ‘managing dispositions’ covered by Edwards relates to the ways that one’s vocal delivery can display one’s subjective stance. There is a growing body of work exploring the relationship between features of delivery and the actions being done, e.g., Wiggins’ (2002) research into the gustatory ‘mmm’, Hepburn’s research into crying (2004) and Stokoe and Hepburn’s (2005) examination of complaints and reports about noisy neighbours. Edwards also explores new technology for studying the phonetic and intonational features of speech, and demonstrates the basis for his transcription gloss ‘plain-tively’ by including readouts of the amplitude and pitch trace of the utterance, along with some cautions about the over-reliance on such technology in isolation from other important features. He notes that objective features of talk are checkable in other ways, for example by examining their uptake from the co-interactants. As Goodwin and