

Our Talk and Walk
Discourse Analysis and
Conflict Studies

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Executive Summary

A relatively new research technique in the social sciences, discourse analysis can contribute to conflict studies by introducing a focus on social realities, identities, and power distribution and legitimization. Providing an overview of the main philosophical ideas behind the present day discourse schools, including a discussion of these, this paper aims to facilitate choice for conflict researchers searching for an angle to analyze conflicts from a discourse perspective. Suggestions of conflict topics where discourse analysis might prove insightful are given. Finally, an expansion of the conflict research discourse itself is recommended.

Preface

Clingendael publications in the field of conflict studies tend to focus on specific thematic or geographic policy issues. This publication is different. It is an attempt to step out of the box. Following some of Clingendael's work in Sri Lanka, the institute took a specific interest in discourse analysis. The book 'Dealing with Diversity: Sri Lankan Discourses on Peace and Conflict' provided an overview of the various discourses people have with regard to conflict in this South Asian country. Conflict studies as a discipline is still coming of age and within the discipline, discourse analysis is by no means a consolidated school of thought. For that reason, we considered it useful to explore some of the more fundamental underpinnings of discourse analysis as well as experiences with it in other disciplines. It was against this background that this study, by Jeannine Suurmond, was conceived.

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Introduction

‘ . . . Son of man, You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats. . . ’
(T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922))

Creating coherence out of broken images is the challenge of the storyteller. Cultivated by stories and experiences that in turn become part of the stories, we may wonder which life activity is actually not involved in story making. During the most intense experiences, we run out of words. Some experiences prove inexpressible. Stories, discourses and narratives make up our identities, realities and the way we attribute meaning to our lives. As such, we, skilled storytellers, create coherence and order. Bringing order in chaos, consistency and coherence constrain choice and freedom.

Having an identity constrains choice. Identities consist of stories, at least partly, a viewpoint recognized by various disciplines. For instance, a psychologist may differentiate between an implicit, personal(ity) identity and an explicit, cultural identity relying heavily on autobiographical elements (Lewis & Ferrari, in press); while a social movement theorist may emphasize that the construction of collective action cannot be separated from personal biography (Kling, 1995). And a conflict researcher may advocate the need to investigate how a discourse can come to define the relationship between the individual and society (Jabri, 1996). Indeed, the question of how one discourse may come to dominate people’s minds lies at the heart of conflict.

Living in a social reality constrains choice. Stories can be manipulated, discourses taken for granted or imposed, and narratives broken. Possible consequences are power abuse, conflict and exploitation. In investigating origins of conflict, a large amount of conflict research has focused on rather macro-level causes, like greed and grievance, resource competition, or state or structural failure. But people enact the actual conflict. Recently, conflict researchers have directed their attention to the realities in which people live and the role of discourse in shaping these. A diversity of conflicts has been studied out of a discourse perspective (e.g. Sri Lanka (Frerks and Klem, 2004); Srebrenica (Rijsdijk, 2003); Europe (Diez, 2001); Burundi (Lemarchand, 1996); South-America (e.g. Robben, 1989)).

This ‘discursive wave’ in conflict research is the result of the broader ‘discursive turn’ in the social sciences, where the analytical attention shifted from the object of research to the products of that research, that is, the written texts in which researchers presented their findings. Challenging the concept of ‘pure objectivity’, the rise of this influential development focusing on language as mediating and creating people’s realities, has received broad attention. Though having ancient roots, discourse theory offered a ‘new’ paradigm, inspiring many researchers to reassess their views. A wide array of flourishing and still developing discourse schools is the result.

Since discourse analysis, among other subjects, deals with reality, identity, meaning, and power, it may be a useful and important tool for conflict research. Studying the realities and the

meaning attributions of actors in a conflict, can contribute to a deeper understanding of the issues at stake.

The views and methodologies of different discourse schools may enrich or complement each other. For this reason, the present paper serves a dual purpose: to provide an overview of the main contemporary discourse schools and to explore the contribution of discourse analysis to conflict studies. Since contemporary discourse schools draw from a range of different philosophical ideas, chapter one provides a bird's eye overview of the main philosophical schools, which have preceded and inspired the discourse thinkers of today. In turn, chapter two provides a brief discussion of some of the most important discourse schools. Finally, chapter three draws some general conclusions on discourse research and suggests discourse research topics for conflict and peace studies, ending the paper with a proposal for the expansion of the general discourse of conflict research itself.

I: Philosophy of Language and Discourse

For a solid understanding of present day's variety of discourse analytic schools of thought, this chapter will discuss some of the main ideas in Western philosophy, which have been an inspiration to contemporary discourse scientists. In the effort to be both as complete and as brief as possible, the richness and complexity of some categorizations and descriptions are inevitably simplified.

1.1 First Movers: Greek Rhetoric

Language was a hot topic in ancient Greece. Decisions were made through speech acts like deliberation and voting. It was the political skill of the age. Those who could speak or write well could influence the public debate. No wonder an outspoken thinker entered the agora to declare that language can be used as means to not only influence, but also to understand humans: "Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words", as Aristotle elaborated (350 B.C.E.: 1). Though arguing with Plato and Epicures about the exact meaning of words, all shared the assumption that terms have meaning insofar they refer to the 'essences' of things. An idea challenged later by 20th century language philosophers.

1.2 Analytic Philosophy and Ordinary Language Philosophy: *Wovon Man Nicht Sprechen Kann, Darüber Muss Man Schweigen; But You Could Point at It*

Classical rhetorical theory, along with hermeneutics, can be regarded as the roots of modern discourse theory. Leaving aside medieval philosophy, early modern philosophy and recent modern philosophy, we arrive at the turn of the 20th century where the specific interest in language blossoms anew and where 'analytic philosophy' dominates the English-speaking countries. Together with his colleagues¹, Wittgenstein is seen as the founder of this tradition. Originally a logical positivist, the early Wittgenstein strove to employ logical rigor for analyzing texts. He regarded language solely as a tool for describing the state of affairs in reality, ideally in the clearest way as possible. By contrast, in his later life he came to see the vagueness of language as linguistically enriching. "Believing that language can perfectly capture reality, is a kind of bewitchment" (1958, para. 109), he stated and instead proposed to carefully examine the use of ordinary language. According to him, the meaning of words is loosely defined by their use in a variety of 'language games', sets of (informal) rules governing the use of the expression in actual life. To directly refer to something is only one of many ways in which our linguistic activity may function. Communicating through language can then not only be seen as a constative act, portraying the world, but also as performative, in which '*saying something is actually doing something*'. An idea elaborated on in Austin's speech-act theory.

¹ The Vienna Circle, Russell, Moore, Frege, Popper

Searle, Grice, and Habermas were among other philosophers who followed in Wittgenstein's linguistic footsteps.

Outbuilding Austin's (and Searle's) speech act philosophy, Habermas (1981) located in all speech acts 'telos' (Greek for 'purpose' or 'goal'). This is the goal of mutual understanding, which all human beings are able to bring about through communication. Extrapolating this idea, *rationality is then located in everybody's communicative competence*. Positioning himself in the power and political debates of the sixties, he posited the fact that we now live in a rationalized, humanized, democratized society is, on the one hand, due to the institutionalization of our rationality potential. On the other hand, this potential has become suppressed in major domains of social life, like the market, state, and organizations, where rationality is no longer rooted in life-experiences, but follows the logic of the system or strategic or instrumental desires.

1.3 Philosophical Hermeneutics versus Critical Theory

Habermas and Gadamer have engaged in a famous debate over the possibility of transcending culture and history (1967-1971). Habermas argued against Gadamer's strict separation of research techniques of the natural and hermeneutic sciences. According to the latter, text and its author could not be studied with the same methods employed by the natural sciences. As a pupil of Heidegger, Gadamer (1989) extended his definition of hermeneutics, regarding it as revealing the original meaning of the texts. This meaning must be understood in terms of the historical situations of the author and interpreter, since all people have a 'historically affected consciousness' affecting their understanding. Therefore, no final interpretation of a text exists: *every discourse takes place in a shared horizon of prejudice* (or, as others phrased it: preunderstanding (Heidegger), lifeworld (Habermas)). As Habermas had attacked the principles of Gadamer's hermeneutics as conservative, he proposed critical theory as an alternative. Critical theory can be understood as a general term for new theoretical trends (roughly since the 1960s, Frankfurt school), in a variety of fields and informed by, among others, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and Marxist theory. Its major concerns center on questions of identity, processes through which these are developed, and the ways cultural institutions are used to shape identities, setting norms by which some are privileged and others denied.

Later on, an attempt was made to reconcile critical theory with hermeneutics by Ricoeur, but his own work did not really resemble Gadamerian hermeneutics. To Ricoeur, hermeneutics meant primarily communication, including not only a phenomenological, but also a structuralist dimension. In describing an analogy between actions and texts, *Ricoeur (1971) defined four traits of discourse, as distinct from language as a system*. First, a language system as conceived by structuralists (discussed later on) is simply virtual and hence timeless, but discourse always occurs at some particular moment of time. Second, a language system is self-contained, but discourse always refers to persons who say, write, hear, or read. Third, though a language system is a necessary condition for communication inasmuch as it provides the codes for communication, it itself does not communicate. Only discourse communicates among interlocutors. And fourth, the signs in a language system refer only to other signs in it, but discourse "refers to a world that it claims to describe, to express, or to represent" (1981: 132).

1.4 Discourse as a Mode of Power: Marxism and Feminism

In the sixties and seventies, two philosophical streams were specifically concentrating on discourse, action, and power relations. The political left analyzed power inequality as legitimized and enacted by discourse: language is always interest-related. Marxist thinkers like Althusser, Pêcheux, and Jameson, drawing on the legacy of the earlier Voloshinov and Bakhtin, interpreted *discourse as embodying the conflicting values and stances of different groups* (Bakhtin, 1981). Even non-Marxists could support that discourse regulates behavior and conceals and perpetuates inequality. Cixous, a French feminist theoretician, applied Derridian techniques of deconstruction to texts and came to see writing “as constituted in a ‘discourse’ of relations, social, political, and linguistic in makeup, and these relations are characterized in a masculine or feminine ‘economy’” (Briganti and Davis, 1997). According to her, the exclusion of women from writing and speaking is linked to the fact that the Western history of writing is synonymous with the history of reasoning and with the separation of the body from the text. The body entering the text disrupts the masculine economy of superimposed linearity and tyranny. Since theoretical writing has been reduced to masculine laws, one could just as well give up theorizing completely. Cixous herself found eventually more freedom in writing theatre plays, since these easier allow “openness”, that is, the possibility to go beyond the masculine text of reason and order.

1.5 Postmodernity: The Subversion of Meta-Narratives

In the beginning of the 20th century, influential figures such as Heidegger (phenomenologist), Lacan (psychoanalyst), Barthes (structuralist) en Wittgenstein (logical positivist) had paved the way for postmodern developments. Philosophy shifted paradigm: the dominant view that language simply expresses the world and its properties was overruled by a focus on language in itself: *how is our world made from the meanings that language expresses?* Languages are rather constitutive of, as the late Wittgenstein (1958) put it, ‘forms of life’. This ‘Linguistic Turn’ marked the beginning of a strong reaction to modernity. The existence of a universal objective truth was heavily contested, artificially sharp dichotomies were rejected, and instead the particularity and irony of language and life became regarded as positive. Drawing from these viewpoints, a number of thinkers developed a new approach to language, resulting in a wide array of schools with often hybrid connections and disputable borders, as exemplified by the three developments of structuralism, post-structuralism, and social constructionism discussed below.

1.6 Structuralism: Language as a Complete System with Signs as the Basic Units

Although the term ‘structuralism’ does not clearly refer to a specific school of authors, it became one of the most common approaches for analyzing culture, society and language in the second half of the 20th century. Structuralists look at the units of a system, and the rules making that system work, regardless of the content. In language, Saussure identified words as the units, and the forms of grammar as the rules ordering the words. All languages have the same structure: words are put together within a grammatical system to make meaning. It is the human mind, and not the senses, which generates the underlying structures organizing the units and rules into a meaningful system. Therefore, *the order in which we perceive the world to be is a*

product of the mind. According to Saussure (1959), thought is a shapeless mass in which only language can bring order. Ideas do not preexist language, moreover, thought cannot even exist without language. Partly inspired by Saussure's ideas, Lévi-Strauss (1958) published one of the first cross-cultural studies explicitly analyzing narratives, such as myths and folktales, equating their structure with the structure of language. Culture to him was a system of symbolic communication, which one for a great part could understand by analyzing its linguistics.

Next to anthropology, a variety of other disciplines, like psychology², embraced language analysis in their research curriculum. New disciplines emerged, like semiotics³ (the study of signs), ethnomethodology⁴ (concentrating on the way people make sense of the world), conversation analysis⁵ (concerned with the study of talk in interaction), and linguistics (the study of human language). For the latter, language, abstracted from the fuzziness of cultural and social contexts, offered an attractive and theoretical 'sound' way of analysis. Indeed, it was here where the dichotomy between language and discourse became emphasized, as exemplified by Saussure's famous distinction. Here, 'language' refers to the system of rules and conventions independent of and pre-existing individual users, while 'parole' refers to its use in particular instances. Subsequently taken into use by structuralist cultural theorists, this dichotomy between usage and system has been criticized especially by Marxist theorists for its rigidity, splitting process from product, subject from structure⁶.

1.7 Reaction: Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction

Although at first some hoped structuralism to be the final all-embracing 'meta-theory' uniting the scientific disciplines, it was by the end of the 20th century put away as historically important, while the movements it had brought forth were believed to have the future. Post-structuralistic ideas favored the ability of individual people to act over the deterministic forces of structures. Time, dominated by the political turbulence of the sixties and seventies, shifted the academic attention to issues like power and struggle. Especially in France, discourse analysis became a convergence point for new trends, like 'cognitive linguistics', 'critical linguistics', 'ethnography of communication', 'ethnomethodology', and the structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction and feminism, as well as semiotics and cognitive science. Other parts of the world witnessed new trends as well, like 'text linguistics', in Europe, and 'functional' or 'systemic linguistics' in Czechoslovakia, Britain, and Australia (Beaugrande, 1997).

One of the most important philosophers in the theory of discourse analysis, Foucault, argued that complex differential power relationships extend to every aspect of our social, cultural and political lives, involving all manner of (often contradictory) 'subject-positions', and securing our assent not so much by the threat of punitive sanctions as by persuading us to internalize the norms and values that prevail within the social order (Sarup, 1993: 74).

Dethroning the 'subject', he emphasized that it is produced within discourse and always subjected to discourse. *When we position ourselves we become the subject of a particular discourse, and thus the bearer of its power and knowledge*. Foucault (1984) insisted that power operates through discursive regimes and has a strong institutional dimension, as illustrated by

² E.g. Chomsky, Piaget, Lacan

³ E.g. Saussure, Peirce, Propp

⁴ E.g. Garfinkel, Schütz

⁵ E.g. Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson.

⁶ E.g. Voloshinov.

the forceful marginalization of deviant behavior by discursive rationality. Analyzing power relations can thus tell us a lot about the discursive reality of a given time and culture. Genuine freedom can only be achieved through detachment from what is expected of us as 'normal'. Chapter two further elaborates on Foucault's 'discourse theory'.

The norms deciding for what is 'normal', are, according to Bourdieu, socially conditioned. In growing up, *we acquire not only language, but also 'habitus'*: "A system of durably acquired schemes of perception, thought and action, engendered by objective conditions but tending to persist even after an alteration of those conditions" (1979). Among group members, cultural capital, the (re)production of shared "dispositions, behavior, habits, good taste, *savoir faire* and attitudes" (Andres, 1994: 122) is fundamentally embodied in the individual as a habitus. Therefore, class structures and power are maintained by habitus.

It was this habitus that Derrida sought to uncover in his deconstruction of texts. Emphasizing the ambiguity of language instead of the crystal clear logic of underlying structures, Derrida analyzed texts to reveal internal arbitrary hierarchies and presuppositions, in order to show what is not said and redefining what is said. Take, for example, the binary conceptions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Derrida (1992) showed that they are used as polar opposites defined by culture and worldview (Bourdieu's habitus), while in the absolute sense they are impossible to separate fully and actually non-existent. As such, *a deconstructed text reveals numerous, often conflicting, viewpoints*.

1.8 Structuralist / Post-structuralist Spill-Over: Social Constructionist Epistemology

Postmodern thought was in 1966 introduced in sociology by Berger and Luckmann, gearing the interest towards discovering how social reality and social phenomena are constructed. From a sociological view, the constructionist method is to unravel the ways social phenomena are created, institutionalized, and made tradition by humans: not analyzing causes and effects, but describing the institutions, actions, and so forth. *Reality is a subjective reality*. It is the way we perceive and reproduce it through our interpretation and knowledge. Social constructionism, thus, uses a relativist and anti-essentialist epistemology, repudiating the existence of an external world.

A distinction exists between social constructivism and social constructionism. The former postulates social origins of the mind (Vygotsky, 1930s), the latter rejects the mind in favor of the representations of mind in social interaction. Gergen (1973) took a social constructionist position in psychology, by differentiating psychology from the natural sciences and relating it to history: "at best it can relate, describe, and sometimes try to explain the phenomena of social life, where those phenomena are specific to a particular time, place and culture". Bruner (1990) took even an anti-naturalist stance, replacing biology by culture as responsible for shaping human life and mind. It is culture that gives meaning to action by situating its underlying intentional states in an interpretive system. *For a social constructionist, meaning is a product of the prevailing cultural frame, of its social, linguistic, discursive and symbolic practices*. Criticized by some as a soft discipline showing only the 'social constructionism of social constructionism', others attribute the rise of cultural studies to its influence.

Drawing a general conclusion, the discussion above illustrates that from the earliest beginnings of Western philosophy thinkers have been fascinated by language and discourse as rewarding subjects of thought, debated across times and places. Thoughts and ideas on language have moved from rhetorics and hermeneutics to reality description and language games, from

performative functions to language as a powertool, from structuralism to deconstruction, for now ending the motion with language and discourse actually creating social reality. Chapter two will focus on the term 'discourse' in more detail, elaborating the philosophical ideas of this chapter in the discussion of some of the prominent discourse research schools of the moment.

II: Contemporary Discourse Research Schools

Over time, the term ‘discourse’ has been described in very narrow as well as very broad definitions. In some cases, discourse research papers do not even define the term precisely. A common denominator for discourse analysis is the emphasis on language. A second denominator, although already more contested, will be the effect of language in and on the world. Therefore, some researchers (e.g. Gee, 1999) distinguish between ‘little d-discourse’ and ‘big D-discourse’, the first referring to the linguistic definition of discourse as a variety of approaches studying text and talk, the latter referring to the, for example, Foucauldian definition of discourses as complex constructions of beliefs, ideologies and actions comprising social practices. In a similar vein, other researchers (e.g. Conely and O’Barr, 1998) have distinguished between micro- and macrodiscourses, the first referring to text and talk, the latter to ideologies and larger institutional practices. Finally, a few researchers, especially from the side of critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 2001), attempt to link d-discourse analysis with D-discourse analysis.

Next to the level of discourse analysis, the aim of strands of discourse analysis can also differ (Hammersley, 2002). For example, they might either concentrate on developing a theoretical understanding of the discursive mechanisms, or on the way production and effects of texts are related to social contexts (a distinction illustrated clearly by the disciplines of conversation analysis vs. critical discourse analysis, further discussed below). Moreover, they may differ in focus (e.g. drawing conclusions about discourse itself vs. social processes), disagree on what can be inferred or produced from texts (e.g. Schegloff vs. Fairclough, 1995: about local context vs. macro-societal contexts), and conduct different levels of analysis (e.g. word, interaction, or conversation), using a different methodology⁷.

This chapter aims to provide a brief overview of some of the most important discourse analytic research schools, thereby leaving other strands aside⁸. The present selection is partly based on the relative size and impact of the school, and partly on perceived potential relevance for the area of conflict studies. For example, it is assumed that grammatical discourse analysis will be of less relevance for conflict research, since it aims to draw conclusions restricted to the text itself and not beyond. By contrast, there are several smaller research schools which may be of relevance for conflict studies, but which fall beyond the scope of the chapter since they can be regarded as relatively small specializations developed out of the mainstream research schools⁹.

⁷ For an interesting overview of the multidisciplinary field: *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (Vol 1 and 2), Teun A. van Dijk (Ed., 1997), Sage Ltd, London.

⁸ For an overview of the research schools discussed in this chapter, see Table 1.

⁹ Examples of approaches left out here are ‘argumentative discourse analysis’, used in political science for “analyzing politics as a play of ‘positioning’ at particular ‘sites’ of discursive production” (Hajer, 2002); ‘action-implicative discourse analysis’, which aims “to construct a view of the problems, strategies, and ideals of a practice so that a practice’s participants will be able to reflect more thoughtfully about how to act” (Tracy, 2004: 2); and ‘comprehensive discourse analysis’, as proposed by Grimshaw (1992), and concerned with the analysis of conflict talk and international negotiations.

Organized according to the level of analysis, the chapter starts with micro- and ends with macrodiscourse research. First, the linguistic approach(es) to discourse analysis will be touched upon, then conversation analysis will be discussed, and finally a larger paragraph is dedicated to discourse analysis in the social sciences.

2.1 Linguistic Approaches to Discourse Analysis

As a universal characteristic of our species, language has always been fascinating to human beings. The area of linguistics covers human language in its broadest sense. Some discourse analysts are linguists, or applied linguists, and analyze textual materials (often written texts rather than spoken interaction) in terms of their grammatical structures. Important questions in this field are: What is language and how does it evolve? How does language serve as a medium of communication, and of thinking? And what is common to all languages, how do they differ?

On a structural, formal level, modern linguistics is concerned with the study of grammar, and the study of smaller units of language, like sounds (phonetics and phonology), parts of words (morphology), meaning (semantics) and the order of words in sentences (syntax). When studying larger chunks of language as they flow together, discourse analysis is conducted.

On a contextual level, linguistics is concerned with the way language fits into the world, its social function, how it is acquired, produced and perceived. Types of research taking this perspective are concerned with macrolinguistics. By contrast, independent linguistics considers language in its own right, independent of related externalities, also called microlinguistics and regarded as the core of the discipline. Examples of macrolinguistics are the discipline of sociolinguistics, and some versions of narrative analysis, further discussed below.

2.1.1 Sociolinguistics: *The Effect of Society on Language*

Language is one of the most powerful emblems of social behavior, representing fundamental dimensions of social behavior and human interaction at all levels. This assumption guides sociolinguistic research in the study of the effect of any aspect of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on *the way language is used*. Labov is often regarded as the founder of this discipline. His research centred on the study of dialects and the linguistic features of Black English Vernacular (Labov, 1972). Based on his research foci, topics in sociolinguistics range from dialects, varying from place to place, to the usage of language, varying among social classes (age, sex, religion, ethnicity).

Two trends have characterized the development of sociolinguistics over the past several decades (Wolfram, 1991). First, the rise of particular specializations within this field has coincided with the emergence of broader social and political issues, so that the attention to themes such as language and nationalism, language and ethnicity, and language and gender corresponded with the rise of related issues in society at large. Second, specialists examining the role of language and society have become more and more interested in applying the results of their studies to the broader based social, educational, and political problems, flavouring their work with critical notions. For example, Kress (1991) argued that *a frequently used powerful discursive practice in politics is to change verbs into nouns (“nomalisation”), and to use passive instead of active forms of verbs* (e.g. “there will be an attack”, instead of “we are going to attack”). According to him, these grammatical features are a discursive practice, since their

effect is to constitute the attack as ‘agentless’, that is, promoting the interests of certain social groups, while mitigating responsibility.

2.1.2 Narrative Analysis: Sequenced Storytelling

Another field Labov has further developed is that of narrative analysis. The area of linguistics has made a significant contribution to this interdisciplinary tool, especially in the structural inquiry of narratives. In its broadest sense, narrative can be action as well as a product to which ordering is essential. Narrative analysis is the analysis of a chronologically told story, investigating the way elements are sequenced, why some elements are evaluated differently from others, *how the past shapes perceptions of the present, how the present shapes perceptions of the past, and how both shape perceptions of the future*. Some researchers (e.g. Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988) distinguish between ‘discursive’ and ‘narrative’ modes of ordering experience, the first relying on logical, linear reasoning while the latter depending “on the narrative aspects of a situation to show how one state of affairs is motivated by a previous one (although not necessarily *caused* by it) [italics and brackets original]” (Worth, 2004). Yet Labov (1972: 359-360) restricted narrative to: “one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred”.

In distinguishing one narrative from the other, Propp (1968) has been influential in literary narrative analysis with his analysis of Russian fairy tales. He distinguished a number of smallest narrative units, ‘functions’, (called narratemes by his later followers) which repeatedly appear in almost every tale and which transcend cultural specificities¹⁰. By reference to these units, the narrative ordering of any tale could be recognized as a sequence of functions of the main characters and actions, thereby in fact creating a generative grammar of narrative: a finite system of abstract units generates an infinite set of narrative sequences. In contrast to written narratives, Labov distinguished structural components of spoken narratives based on a functional classification of utterance types, like ‘evaluation’, in an attempt to uncover the event structure of a spoken narrative (Labov, 2001).

Yet another interesting field employing narrative analysis, although not directly related to linguistics, uses narrative as a paradigm to study human behavior. This discipline, called ‘narrative psychology’, will be highlighted in the paragraph below.

2.1.3 Along the Narrative Line: Narrative Psychology

Narrative psychology extensively focuses on the effect narratives have on human behavior. Relying on social constructivism, narrative psychology studies the ‘narrative nature of human conduct’ (Sarbin, 1986), and the way human beings make sense of experience by constructing stories and listening to the stories of others. Narrative psychology questions issues on the entity of ‘self’, as well as the influence of culture on behavior and identity. By contrast, Gergen (1991), makes no distinction between self and culture, to him the self is by nature relational. The very concept of human memory, as some kind of process in human minds, is a discursive artifact. The self is continuously negotiated, and to such extent depending on others’ affirmation

¹⁰ Examples of narratemes include (Propp, 1968):

* A member of a family leaves home (the hero is introduced);

* An interdiction is addressed to the hero ('don't go there', 'go to this place');

* The interdiction is violated (villain enters the tale).

that this places one in a precarious interdependent position. Instead of seeing one's life as simply one thing after another, *people attempt to understand life-events as related, constructing ordered self-narratives, which give a sense of meaning and directions* (Gergen and Gergen, 1988). In this light, it is not surprising that this meaning-making process in some cases fails to deliver. By deconstructing the meaning of individuals' lives and relationships, and by showing the difference between reality and the internalized self-narratives, narrative therapy (e.g. White and Epston, 1990), may assist people to resolve problems. This method encourages people to claim alternative, preferred stories of self-identity and ways of life, in order to help re-author one's own life.

2.2 Conversation Analysis

In contrast to more linguistic discourse analysis, conversation analysis aims to provide detailed analysis of 'real' talk. Once a sub-discipline in sociology, conversation analysis is now a discipline in its own right, while also influencing other disciplines like sociolinguistics, discursive psychology and discourse analysis. Drawing from ethnomethodological principles (further discussed below), conversation analysis studies patterns in naturally occurring talk, without taking any social constructions into account (e.g. ideologies), and using detailed transcription, in order to allow some methodological rigor. Since ethnomethodology is at the root of conversation analysis, this discipline will first be briefly discussed in the following paragraph, then followed by a short discussion of conversation analysis.

2.2.1 Ethnomethodology: *The Illusion of Social Order*

Firmly rooted in social constructionism and inspired by phenomenology, the sociological discipline of ethnomethodology literally studies 'people's methods'; the way people make sense of their social world. The founding father, Garfinkel (1967), wrote that although social reality might appear ordered, it in fact is potentially chaotic. Social order is constructed in the minds of actors in reaction to the individual's confrontation with a series of sense impressions and experiences, which somehow must be organised into a coherent scheme. This ordering takes place as a psychological process, which he termed the 'documentary method'. *Certain facts, which appear to conform to a pattern, are selected. Subsequently, this pattern guides how one makes sense of these facts.* Once the pattern has been established, it is used as a 'map' for interpreting new facts, arising within the situation.

An important aspect of the documentary method, Garfinkel stresses, is 'indexicality'. People make sense of a remark, sign or action, by reference to the context in which it occurs. We 'index' it to particular circumstances. In social life, all behaviour and discourse is theoretically indexical: its meaning varies according to context. In our daily lives, the documentary method provides us with series of patterns helping us to make sense of and to cope with everyday situations, creating a confusion-free social reality.

Ethnomethodological research methods are specifically designed to create confusion, to break the daily routine of interaction in order to reveal the effort it takes to maintain the normal flow of life. One research design consisted, for example, of giving nonsense psychological advice to students, who faithfully struggled to make some kind of sense out of it (Garfinkel, 1967). Ethnomethodology thus tends to regard text and talk purely as tools for achieving actions, concentrating rather on how the interaction is performed, since the common methods of

communication are the only objective social reality able to be studied. Garfinkel's method has greatly influenced sociology, challenging objectivity and spawning a new discipline of interaction analysis, conversation analysis.

2.2.2 Conversation Analysis: The Study of Natural Conversation

Ethnomethodological research is oriented towards the role of text and talk in the daily achievement of institutional action. Conversation analysis¹¹ is rooted in ethnomethodology, and provides a more detailed picture of real talk in society. In line with Austin's speech act theory, conversation analysis holds that talk 'does' things (involves a 'performative act'). Developed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1977, 1974), *a central idea is that an important area of interactional meaning is revealed in the sequence of the conversation*, and that human interactors continually display to each other their own understanding of what they are doing (Slembrouck, 2004). Sacks searched to provide a theoretical basis for understanding abstract types of discursive strategy: conversations are orderly, a product of the systematic deployment of specifiable interactional methods used by social actors. Attention is paid to people's methods, like the way people handle the opportunity to speak, 'take their turn': the way people understand that conversations proceed by taking up what the last person has said¹²; the way people identify and solve problems, the role of movement and gaze in conversation, and finally the workings of conversations in different conventional settings, are major foci of conversation analysis. Important sources of data are conversation recordings, or interview-data, which are transcribed. Conversation analysts claim that context is constituted in and through talk itself: it is only aspects of context, which people demonstrably signal their attention to, that are allowed into the analysis. Interpretation should be restricted to what is visibly displayed in the next response (Schegloff, 1998, 1992). This allows for some analytically rigorous means of research, since inferences of what can be validated by reference are limited to what is observable in the discourse being analyzed.

2.3 Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences

There are numerous research disciplines in which discourse analysis is used, including social psychology, sociology, political science, and cultural studies. The relatively new area of conflict studies has recently turned to discourse analysis as a method for understanding conflicts. This paragraph provides an overview of some of the main discourse analytic streams in different areas of social science. Quite some research has been done on the relation between 'frames' (further defined below) and conflict. Van Dijk (2000) even regards social cognition (containing cognitive frames) as the link between discourse and context. Therefore, this paragraph will first elaborate on the concept of 'framing', then turn to 'discursive psychology', followed by a discussion of 'Foucauldian discourse analysis', 'poststructuralist theory', and ends with a short description of 'critical discourse analysis'.

¹¹ For overviews see Have, 1999; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998.

¹² The fact that people understand that two utterances form an 'adjacency pair', e.g. question/answer.

2.3.1 Frame Analysis: Cognitive Structures Guiding Perception and Interpretation

The focus on cognitive heuristic processes regulating the interpretation of information, was at the core of Goffman's proposed frame analysis, often regarded as an answer to Garfinkel's ethnomethodology. Although the systematization of his methodological concepts is contested (e.g. Gamson, 1975), frame analysis grew popular, spawning different approaches often only loosely linked with Goffman's original concepts (e.g.: 'strategic frame analysis'¹³). According to Goffman (1974), *frames are basic cognitive structures guiding the perception and representation of reality*. Not consciously created, frames are unconsciously adopted in the course of communication processes, determining which parts of reality become noticed, or 'recognized'.

Memory research in cognitive psychology supports Goffman's claim, as script theory explains 'frames' as details about specific events within a script. Scripts, in turn, are large-scale semantic and episodic knowledge structures that accumulate in memory and guide the interpretation and comprehension of ordinary experiences (Ashcraft, 1998). In cognitive-behavioral therapy, de-framing, reframing, and counter-framing are often used methods to change the way people think, which in turn change the way they feel and behave (e.g. Beck, 2000; Hall, 2003). This therapeutical approach has inspired a number of conflict researchers to develop ways of conflict resolution. *As frames provide meaning through selective simplification, filtering people's perception and providing them a vision on a problem, conflict framing, deframing and reframing can help the parties understand and interpret what the conflict is about, what is going on and what they could do about it* (e.g. Rothman, 1997). Research on the intractability of conflicts attributes a large role to frames. Some distinguishing the frames concerned with power, identity, characterization, conflict management, risk or information, and loss versus gain as most important (e.g. Elliott, Kaufman, Shmueli, 2003). Indeed, critical discourse analysts (Van Dijk, 2000) explain the interaction as follows: within social structures, social interaction takes place, which in turn is presented in the form of discourse, which is then 'framed' according to a cognitive system (memory). Group attitudes and the pursuit of group goals and interests, are, in this view, cognitively founded on ideologies functioning as 'interpretation frameworks'. By contrast, other researchers (e.g. Fisher, 1997; Oliver and Johnston, 2000) prefer to distinguish between extra-linguistic discourse forms, like myths and ideologies, and meaning-making discourses containing frames.

It is claimed that, in assessing conflicts, third-party interveners or individual stakeholders can benefit from analyzing the frames involved, including the factors and contexts which might lead to changes within the frame or of the frame itself. Elaborate frames and ways to influence and understand these within a conflict-context have been identified¹⁴. Figure 1 illustrates the framing-reframing process in the course of a conflict.

Next to conflict research, frame analysis is also concerned with the social construction of movements, which until recently have been mainly studied from an organizational or political perspective. In analyzing their discourses, frame theory emphasizes the intentional ways in which movement activists seek to construct their self-presentations, so as to draw support from

¹³ Developed by the 'Frameworks Institute', an NGO aiming to "advance the nonprofit sector's communications capacity by identifying, translating and modeling relevant scholarly research for framing the public discourse about social problems" (www.frameworksinstitute.org).

¹⁴ See for examples: The Conflict Research Consortium Colorado. http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treating_overlays.htm - FRAMING.

others. Over a hundred different frames linked with social movements have been identified (Benford, 1997). Furthermore, frame analysis has been used in public opinion research, content analysis of news, social movement theory, ideology research, and media effects tests.

2.3.2 *Discursive Psychology: Shared Patterns of Meaning*

A new discipline that emerged out of the ‘discursive turn’ in social science is discursive psychology, a research school developed in the 1990s by Potter and Edwards at Loughborough University. Inspired by the language philosophy of Wittgenstein, ethnomethodology, and Sacks’ conversation analysis, and further developing the use of ‘discourse’ in psychology as first proposed by Potter and Wetherell (1987), discursive psychology applies analytical techniques and principles of discourse and conversation analysis to psychological themes. The assumption is that language contains the most basic categories we use to understand ourselves, affecting the way we act and the way we define our identity. Consequently, ‘experience’, ‘subjectivity’ and ‘identity’ are conceptualized only as discursive resources, that is, as localized discursive formations which are continually re-negotiated as speakers encounter different rhetorical contexts (e.g. Billig et al., 1988). Many discourse analysts in psychology claim that we continually draw on shared patterns of meaning and contrasting ways of speaking they would call either ‘repertoires’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), ‘discourses’ (Hollway, 1989; Parker, 1992) or ‘ideological dilemmas’ (Billig et al., 1988).

In general, *discursive psychology formulates discourse as fluid, variable, and as a tool manipulated by speakers who have a stake in the conversation* (e.g. disclaiming blame). Thus, the speaker is seen as being, at least implicitly, an active agent. By conducting detailed studies of natural language use, attempts are made to highlight people’s methods of constructing versions of ‘mental’, ‘social’, and ‘material’ events and processes when involved in a particular situation. For example, discursive psychologists have severely criticized the traditional social psychologist conception of attitude as an abstract, cognitive state of mind (Billig, 1987; Potter, 1996; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). By contrast, viewing discourse as action, the person voicing an opinion is not regarded as expressing a mental state, but performing a social action. This provides an explanation for the fact that people’s opinions have been shown to vary across different situations, even in one conversation. Discursive psychologists have provided several examples of this phenomenon in studies of discourse on racism (Billig et al., 1988; Wetherell and Potter, 1992), gender (Wetherell, Stiven and Potter, 1987), riots (Potter and Reicher, 1987), politics (Edwards and Potter, 1992), and science (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter, 1984). Finally, the stance of ‘critical psychology’ (e.g. Parker, 2002) draws specifically on Foucauldian concepts of ‘ideology’ and ‘power’.

2.3.3 *Foucauldian Discourse Analysis*

A Foucauldian notion of discourse constitutes ‘ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern.’ (Weedon, 1987: 108).

Or, as phrased by Foucault himself:

‘... broad historical systems of meaning including any meaningful political practices (referred to as ‘discursive practices’), which are relatively stable over considerable periods of time’ (as cited in *Mottier, 2002, para. 8*).

As illustrated by the quotes above, Foucault had a very broad vision on discourses, linking together concepts like knowledge, action, power, and the individual. As such, Foucauldian discourse analysis is a typical example of discourse analysis ‘above the level of text’. The term ‘discourse’ is not squeezed in the narrow sense of ‘texts’ but rather defined as referring to the ‘macro-level’ of structural orders of discourse. A poststructuralist thinker, Foucault regarded ‘discourse’ as a group of statements which provide a language for talking about, that is, as a way of representing the knowledge about a particular topic at a particular historical moment, shaped by the relations between power and knowledge (Hall, 1992: 291). As such, *discourses are then negotiated structured sets of related concepts, categorizations, and arguments*. But why would one ‘structured set’ prevail over another at a ‘particular historical moment’? According to Foucault *discourses are regulated by ‘discursive formations’*, “systems of rules which make it possible for certain statements but not for others to occur at particular times, places, and institutional locations” (Fairclough 1992: 40). The glue holding together these discursive formations is not provided by some underlying principle (like logical coherence or any a priori transcendental subject), but, in the words of Foucault, the “regularity in dispersion” (as cited in Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:105).

Other important concepts in Foucauldian discourse theory are that of ‘discursive space’, ‘discursive field’, and ‘subject-position’. Whenever we speak or write, thus engage in discursive action, we always do so from within a position (the ‘subject-position’, e.g. as a doctor, parent, etc.) in a discursive field (consisting of certain discursive formations) in the discursive space (consisting of discursive fields). In this way discursive formations maintain continuity over time, structuring the discursive acts of a wide range of discoursing subjects. Burr (1995) formulated it clearly when he stated

‘Once we take up a position within a discourse (and some of these positions entail a long-term occupation by the person, like gender or fatherhood), we then inevitably come to experience the world and ourselves from the vantage point of that perspective. Once we take on a subject position in discourse, we have available to us a particular, limited set of concepts, images, metaphors, ways of speaking, self-narratives, and so that that we take on as our own’ (p. 145).

Inherent to the subjection of individuals to constraining and enabling discursive formations, is their freedom of acting within and upon these structures. It was at this point in the theory that Foucault encountered critical questions as to what could be held accountable for the structure of these discursive formations, which apparently exercised such a great influence upon the individual. He found his solution in the relation between social practices (e.g. material objects) and discursive practices (e.g. rituals of power), mediated by ‘dispositif’. This dispositif encompasses non-discursive as well as discursive practices, and conceptualises strategies of relations of forces as a grid-like ensemble allowing the analysis of the organisation of social practices and the way subjects are constituted through power/knowledge doubles (e.g. Brenner,

1994). *The continuous power struggles between competing discourses shape the conditions that create our physical, and social world and ourselves.* Thus, our identity is not only constructed in the context of relations of meaning, but also within institutionalized relations of power. Discourses around national identity, sexuality, gender or race do not function autonomously, but rather in the context of the institutional supports and practices upon which they rely (Mottier, 2002). Basing this theory on the findings in his historical studies of asylums, governments, prisons and schools, Foucault argued that institutionalized discourses consist of categorical ‘grids of specification’, classifying and regulating peoples' identities, bodies, domestic and civil spaces, and social practices in different relations of knowledge and power. These discourses, he went on, work in the local situations of social institutions in ways that cannot be explained by reference to any individual's or group's roles, intents or motivations, thereby positing his central argument in favor of the discourse theory. *The phenomenon of social change is explained by the fact that there are always multiple discourses, which can disempower dominant ones, and by the assumption that one discourse usually produces a counter-discourse* (e.g. Fairclough, 2000).

Which implications did this theory have on concrete methodology? Foucault himself based his early research on ‘archaeological’ methodology, while the later Foucault developed the theories and methodology of ‘genealogy’ (see further, for example, Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982). Present day Foucauldian discourse analysts share, in general, a dual goal: to explore discourses in terms of their socio-historic context, and to explore discourses in terms of how they impact the way we experience ourselves. On the one hand, a researcher may conduct comparative research on dominant discourses in different societies or different historical moments, or examine the ‘conditions of possibility’ (e.g. ideologies of gender) for the evolvment of today’s discourses, or, on the other hand, study our ways of seeing and being in the world (our ‘subject-positions’). *In distinguishing one discourse from the other, and in order to be able to define them, Parker (1992) has designed a helpful list of criteria, outlined in Annex 1.*

2.3.4 Poststructuralist Discourse Theory: Discourse Analysis and Politics

The poststructuralism of Foucault, Derrida and Lacan inspired many scientists of different disciplines (e.g. discursive psychology discussed above) to further refine discourse analytic concepts. *In political science, Laclau and Mouffe use discourse analysis for a better understanding of identity politics.* Taking a poststructuralist position, their central premise is that discourse constructs the social world in meaning and that, since language is by nature fundamentally instable, a field of meanings can never be permanently fixed. As results of political struggles, conditions of possibility shape meaning and identity, while embedded in discursive systems. A dominant discursive system always presupposes other possible discursive systems, against which the dominant discourse is counter posed and defined (Howarth, 2000). As such, *hegemony can be conceptualized as the dominance of one particular discourse that has triumphed over others in a particular discursive struggle.* A dynamic, open-ended concept of society is characterized by an unstable equilibrium, so that any kind of transformation is always possible.

The magnum opus of Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (2001, 2nd ed.), has had a staggering effect on political science, redefining concepts like ‘hegemony’, ‘working classes’, ‘political issues and identities’ out of the perspective that the entire realm of human action is discourse. The following box outlines

Torfing’s (1999a) interesting overview of Laclau and Mouffe’s central arguments, together with examples out of the Keynesian economy-paradigm.

Box 1: Overview Central Arguments Laclau and Mouffe with Examples (Torfing, 1999a; italics added)	
Argument	Example
<p>1) Social meaning is neither given as a fact of nature nor grounded in a societal rationality, nor in a certain human essence. Rather, it is relationally constructed as part of a discourse, which cannot be reduced to a semantic region or aspect of the social totality, since it weaves together meaning and action in complex language games.</p> <p>2) Discourse is a result of hegemonic articulations that aim to establish political as well as moral-intellectual leadership in society. Hegemonic practices involve political decisions that are taken within an ultimately undecidable terrain in which paradox and aporia are the rule rather than the exception.</p> <p>3) Hegemonic articulation always involves the construction of social antagonisms by positing a radical and threatening outside, which unifies and stabilizes the discourse in question, while at the same time preventing its closure. Social antagonism is constructed through the exclusion of social identities.</p> <p>4) A hegemonic discourse is dislocated when new events cannot be domesticated, integrated, or explained by the discursive system. Dislocation takes the form of a structural or 'organic' crisis in which the number of floating signifiers proliferate, i.e. words are no longer stably attached to concepts, and the need for the articulation of a new order becomes an urgent political task.</p> <p>5) Because of the recurrent dislocations of discursive systems, the subject cannot be conceived in terms of its structural position within discourse, as structuralist thinkers had done. Discourse analysis sides with the structuralists in their critique of a free, atomistic subject. The subject is internal to the structure, but because of the constant dislocations that disrupt the social and political order, it emerges as a split and divided subject. In order to overcome the traumatizing experience of a 'lack', the subject will seek to establish an illusory full identity. This is done by means of identifying with hegemonic projects that promise to heal the rift by constructing a new fully achieved subjectivity.</p>	<p>1) Keynesian orthodoxy is an example of a discourse that combines textbook theory with political goals, a particular conception of the economy, and specific budgetary practices;</p> <p>2) An example of a hegemonic articulation is the Keynesian construction of the 'balanced budget' as essentially bad, although previously it had been taken to be sound economic doctrine;</p> <p>3) As such, Keynesian orthodoxy was held together by making reference to the common 'evils' of laissez-faire liberalism, the socialist command economy, monetarist supply-side economics, and so forth;</p> <p>4) A good example of dislocation is the stagflation crisis that hit many Western economies at the beginning of the 1970s. Keynesianism was undermined by the joint occurrence of growing unemployment and rising inflation;</p> <p>5) An example of this is the dislocation of the Holy Trinity of Fordist mass production, the welfare state and Keynesian demand management. This has disrupted the identity of the trade unions as a responsible partner in a corporatist system promising full employment, rising wages and generous welfare provisions.</p>

2.3.5 Critical Discourse Analysis: the Challenge of Dominance

While most forms of discourse analysis aim to provide a better understanding of the socio-cultural aspects of texts and talk, critical discourse analysis (CDA) has an overtly political agenda (Kress, 1990). The scope of critical discourse analysis is most often seen as investigating the role of discourse in “the (re)production and challenge of dominance” (Van Dijk 2001: 300).

Drawing from linguistic theory, poststructuralist and neomarxist ideas, the most important assumption of CDA is that *systematic asymmetries of power and resources between speakers and listeners, readers and writers can be linked to their unequal access to linguistic and social resources*. In method, CDA does not differ from other discourse analytic approaches¹⁵. It is its dependence on prior theory that distinguishes CDA from other discourse methods.

CDA draws from three important theoretical strands. In agreement with poststructuralist ideas, it regards discourse as operating laterally across local institutions, and texts as influencing the shaping of human identities and actions. Furthermore, in line with Bourdieu, CDA assumes that textual practices become “embodied” forms of “cultural capital” with exchange value in social fields. Finally, in line with neomarxist theory (and the concept of ‘ideology critique’), CDA states that within those social fields, broader ideological interests, movements, and social formations are produced and articulated by discourses, since they are produced and used within political economies (see Hall, 1996).

One of the most important researchers in this field is Fairclough. In his books (1995, 1989) he proposes three dimensions of CDA: "Where the aim is to map three separate forms of analysis onto one another: analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption), and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice" (1995: 2). Thus, although the initial priority is with written texts, these represent historically and culturally specific social actions and the aim is to identify the textual segments in order to reveal the textual macrostructures.

Critical discourse researchers have covered a wide field of social issues, ranging from the discourse analysis of the neo-liberal Right (Fairclough 2001, 1992), the ‘racist’ and ‘sexist’ discourses (e.g. Rath 1991; Teo, 2000; Van Dijk, 1991, 1987; Verkuyten 1995), to the civic and political structures in textbooks (e.g. Luke, 1995). The ambitious aims of CDA have encountered criticism from other discourse scientists who, for example, disagree with the level of analysis (e.g. Schegloff, Wetherell, Billig), its theory (e.g. Van den Berg, 1992; Wetherell and Potter, 1992), or accuse critical analysts of ignoring evidence contradicting their presuppositions (e.g. Van den Berg, 1992).

As a general conclusion, it may be observed that the amount of ‘discourse’ definitions seems to compare up to the amount of different discourse schools existing. Furthermore, those discourse schools appear to differ widely in research focus, aim, level of analysis, and methodology. Finally, some researchers belonging to different discourse schools seem to disagree among each other as the debate is still going strong. Chapter three will address further conclusions together with general strengths and weaknesses of discourse analysis and propose some research subjects, which may be of interest for conflict researchers.

¹⁵ Fairclough (1989: 110-112) designed a list with 10 main questions (see Annex 2) and a number of sub-questions, which could be addressed when analyzing a text. It is not exhaustive, but merely suggestive of areas for investigation.

III: Discussion and Discourse Analysis as Tool in Conflict Studies

‘Without stories no consensus, without narration no cognitive shifts’
(Hajer (2002): on how stories are a political mechanism in themselves)

The previous two chapters have touched upon the philosophical developments preceding the ‘discursive turn’ in science (Ch 1) and the consequently wide development of an array of discourse schools (Ch 2). The aim was to provide a broad overview of the most important discourse schools of the moment, discussing their theory, methods and assumptions. It has become clear that any researcher interested in discourse analysis can study topics out of intrapersonal, interpersonal and intergroup perspectives, to investigate cognitive, psychological, linguistic, conversational, political, or ideological phenomena.

When applying certain discourse analytical techniques, which fundamental premises does one have to accept? The majority of the discourse schools discussed in chapter two agree on the general idea that people’s utterances follow different patterns. These vary across domains of social life, like ‘medical discourse’, and ‘political discourse’, and discourse analysis is the analysis of these patterns. Following the first premise, some research schools then accept the social constructionist perspective on reality: the way we talk does not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations, but rather plays an active role in creating and changing them. Examples of schools holding this view are the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, discursive psychology, and critical discourse analysis. Conversation analysis, for example, splits off here because this school does not allow for ‘going beyond data’, that is, interpreting data by appealing to a theory. As illustrated by the diversity portrayed in chapter two, discourse analysis is not just another method of data analysis, but a whole package of philosophical views on the role of language in the world, theoretical paradigms, methodological tools, and specific research techniques with specific weaknesses and strengths. Chapter two has touched lightly on these discourse-specific advantages and disadvantages, when discussing a particular school.

Both qualitative and critical approaches to science are represented in discourse analysis. As such, discourse analysis shares their general weaknesses and strengths. Among the strengths of qualitative and critical approaches are the rich and informative results, the emphasis on dynamics instead of statics, and the primacy of the subject matter instead of the method. Among their weaknesses the issues of reliability, the objectivity of coding, the generalizability of the results and the time it takes to analyze numerous data sets can be mentioned.

Because of the high flight discourse analysis has taken in a variety of ways across the scientific disciplines over the past ten years, some researchers argue for some kind of standardization of method and technique. For example, Van Dijk and also Antaki, Billig, Edwards, and Potter, have articulated the need for rigorous, explicit and systemic discourse analytic methods, in order to answer the criticism that “anything goes”, and to scale up the quality of discourse analytic work. The latter researchers have distinguished six analytic shortcomings commonly identifiable in discursive papers: under-analysis through summary,

under-analysis through taking sides, under-analysis through over-quotation or isolated quotation, the circular identification of discourses and mental constructs, false survey, and finally, analysis consisting of simply spotting features¹⁶. Simultaneously illustrating possible pit-falls, these critical notions are actually meant as basic requirements for discourse analysis.

This paper is written to inform the researchers of the Conflict Research Unit in particular, and policy-makers in general about discourse analysis, and to investigate its possible contributions to the particular field of conflict studies. How can discourse analysis be applied in conflict research? Which research questions might be of interest? Hereafter, some discourse-related questions for policy-makers are raised, after which suggestions of discourse applications are given with reference to the causes-dynamics-consequences paradigm often used in conflict research.

A powerful aspect of discourse theory is that it focuses on social realities, posing that stories have a strong influence on people's lives. From this perspective, interesting questions for *policy makers* may include:

- To which extent does a certain policy include people's (local) realities?;
- Does the inclusion of people's discourses contribute to the effectiveness and sustainability of a policy?;
- How can the discourses of people be integrated?;
- On the level of political rhetoric, how are attitudes and opinions influenced by discourses, and what can be said about the influence of discourse change¹⁷?;
- Which presumptions guide your own policy decisions?

Before discussing any conflict stage, *research concerned with proactive conflict prevention* may find in discourse analysis a useful tool¹⁸. For example, it may serve as a research paradigm when investigating 'conditions of (im)possibility' (inspired by Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), conceptualized as the structural or cultural conditions preventing or even delegitimizing violence as power tool. How are identity and meaning constructed in non-violent cultures (e.g. Quakers or Polynesians)? Furthermore, fairly all conflict resolution or prevention techniques involve some kind of discourse analysis, by 'uncovering' the interests behind the bargaining positions, or discourse-play, stimulating a discourse-switch, for example from win-lose to win-win thinking.

Among potential *causes of conflicts* is nationalism, the love for one's country often paired with an antipathy against others. For example:

- In studying nationalism, discourse analysis can provide the framework for analyzing the national identity involved;
- Or, more general, investigate the way national identities understood and the consequences of the division of the world in nation states.

¹⁶ See *Discourse Analysis Means Doing Analysis: A Critique of Six Analytic Shortcomings*, by Antaki, Billig, Edwards, and Potter (2003), for further discussion.

¹⁷ See e.g. on frame theory in Ch 2 or dual-process models of persuasion, e.g. Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman, 1981.

¹⁸ See also the Addendum: Conflict Research and Peace Culture Development.

Material for such analyses may range from history textbooks to the speeches of nationalistic leaders, depending on the scope of the research. Another related potential cause of conflict is the manner of speaking about the ‘other(s)’, and the definition of the issue at stake by the conflict parties. For example:

- Frame-analysis can provide insights on how cultural or religious themes shape the understanding of the issue;
- Frame-analysis can differentiate ‘into-the-sea-framing’ processes, dehumanization processes and zero sum thinking.

Finally, questions of knowledge, power and democracy can be assessed using discourse analysis. For example:

- How are expert claims constructed and discussed in the mass media (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002)?
- How are media audiences receiving competing knowledge claims? The competition between knowledge claims could be empirically defined as a struggle between different discourses representing different ways of understanding aspects of reality and constructing different identities for the people involved (e.g. the ‘expert’ versus ‘layperson’).
- Questions of how power relations are justified, and how consensus is created can be of interest to conflict researchers using discourse analysis.

In analyzing the *dynamics of a conflict*, discourse analysis can illuminate processes such as competition, cooperation, polarization, and (de-) escalation. Examples include:

- Cultural competence. Cultural competence can be defined as the ability to handle and allow multiple discourses within a society. In the running up towards war, it is a common phenomenon that alternative discourses (e.g. those of the opposition) are excluded from the dominant one by the leaders, so that ‘the nation stands under one flag’. One can relate this to the so-called ‘low integrative complexity’ of political speech, associated with unyielding strategy, while by contrast; ‘high integrative complexity’ is associated with a more flexible strategy. Attempts have been made to use ‘integrative complexity’ as a predictor of the outbreak, respectively the avoidance of war (Conway, Suedfeld and Tetlock, 2001). Analyzing political rhetoric and coding verbal passages for their complexity is a form of discourse analysis, which might contribute to the prediction of violent or peaceful actions;
- The analysis of the role of ideologies and how they move from or towards each other in the course of a conflict may very well be studied from a discourse perspective, shedding more light on the complexity of conflict dynamics.

In studying the *consequences of conflicts*, interesting topics for discourse researchers might be

- The role of ‘war stories’ in the search for ‘truth’ and justice. In healing and dealing with collective traumas, techniques adopted from narrative psychology may prove helpful (e.g. in the reconstruction of histories, or the reauthoring of life for dehumanized social groups, like child soldiers);

- Critical discourse research may uncover ‘ideologies of antagonism’ (Staub, 1989), by which, as a result of a history of conflict, hostilities, and mutual violence, groups regard each other as representing a threat to one’s existence, while simultaneously (partly) deriving their identity from this enmity to the other (e.g. Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, Kressel 1996);
- Discourse analysis conducted on the rhetoric of leaders may reveal mitigation of blame, unlawful justifications or external attributions;
- In post-conflict settings, critical discourse analysis might give voice to the poor when describing their discourses and uncover abusive power relations.

Since discourse analysis deals with large themes such as social reality and identity, it might be very interesting to study *meta-conflicts*, a topic which so far has received little attention. At any conflict stage, several meta-conflicts are involved. Meta-conflicts can be implicit assumptions or principles guiding decisions, such as ‘violence as revenge for violence suffered’ (Galtung, 2000), or ‘violence is an unavoidable expression of human nature, even necessary’.

In conclusion, discourse analysis can contribute to fairly all levels of conflict analysis, be it the history (how are colonial legacies perceived?), economy (how are struggles over valued resources explained/legitimated?), politics (revealing power relations, who claims to have knowledge?), sociology (how are the social forces involved constructed?), anthropology (how is ethnicity defined, cultural values defended?), or psychology (how are identities constructed?) of conflict. Especially in understanding intractable conflicts, discourse analysis may prove useful. The analysis of the fundamental interests of the parties involved, including their needs, moral values, sense of justice, and identity issues may clarify these issues often at the heart of protracted conflicts.

The area of discourse analysis is developing at high speed. This paper tried to highlight the discourse schools that are at the forefront of the discussion today. Much more can be said about the possible contribution of discourse analysis to the area of conflict studies, but this falls outside the scope of the present paper. In any case, discourse analysis can provide insights in a world where reality is fluid and conflict transformative. Out of this perspective, the following addendum proposes an expansion of conflict research.

Addendum: Conflict Research and Peace Culture Development

“And the war began, that is, an event took place opposed to human reason and all human nature”

(L. Tolstoy (1868), *War and Peace*, Book 9: 1812, ch. 1)

Partaking in a general trend, discourse analysis brings in a focus on human realities. Over the last ten years, the discourse of conflict research has slowly expanded to include other disciplines (e.g. anthropology, sociology, psychology), adding cultural, societal and behavioral insights to the political, economical and military perspectives on conflicts. NGO's, academic institutes, and recently also (semi)-governmental organizations reflect this multidisciplinary trend in the broadening their scope of research, researchers, and policies.

Although this may be promising, still today, the traditional approaches to conflict prevail, especially guiding the decisions of institutions involved with policy-making. The prioritizing of reactive conflict research and security overshadows a focus on more proactive peace culture and structure development.

Taking a discourse perspective, such a peace approach would locate violence in social realities, instead of humans¹⁹. Social realities can change. Social influence theories in psychology offer tantalizing insights in how people come to change attitudes and behavior²⁰; insights already used in conflict resolution strategies when relying upon attitude change to influence behavior. In any case, the emphasis would be on the conditions leading people to either act violently, or inspiring them to act cooperatively.

Next to the conflict research already being done, it would therefore seem advisable to develop a transdisciplinary, peace culture research and training line. This would expand the horizon of present day conflict research with a focus on structural change²¹.

¹⁹ Half a century of psychology research confirms that violence is learned behavior (American Psychological Association, 2005).

²⁰ E.g. cognitive dissonance theory postulates that people seek consistency in their lives, and are therefore sensitive to contradictions and inconsistencies. In the case of a discrepancy between attitudes and behavior, it is very likely that the attitude will change to accommodate behavior, especially when it involves self-image (Festinger, 1950; feedback loop analogy of identity, Burke 1991). The more inconsistency, the more change in attitudes or/and behavior is likely to happen.

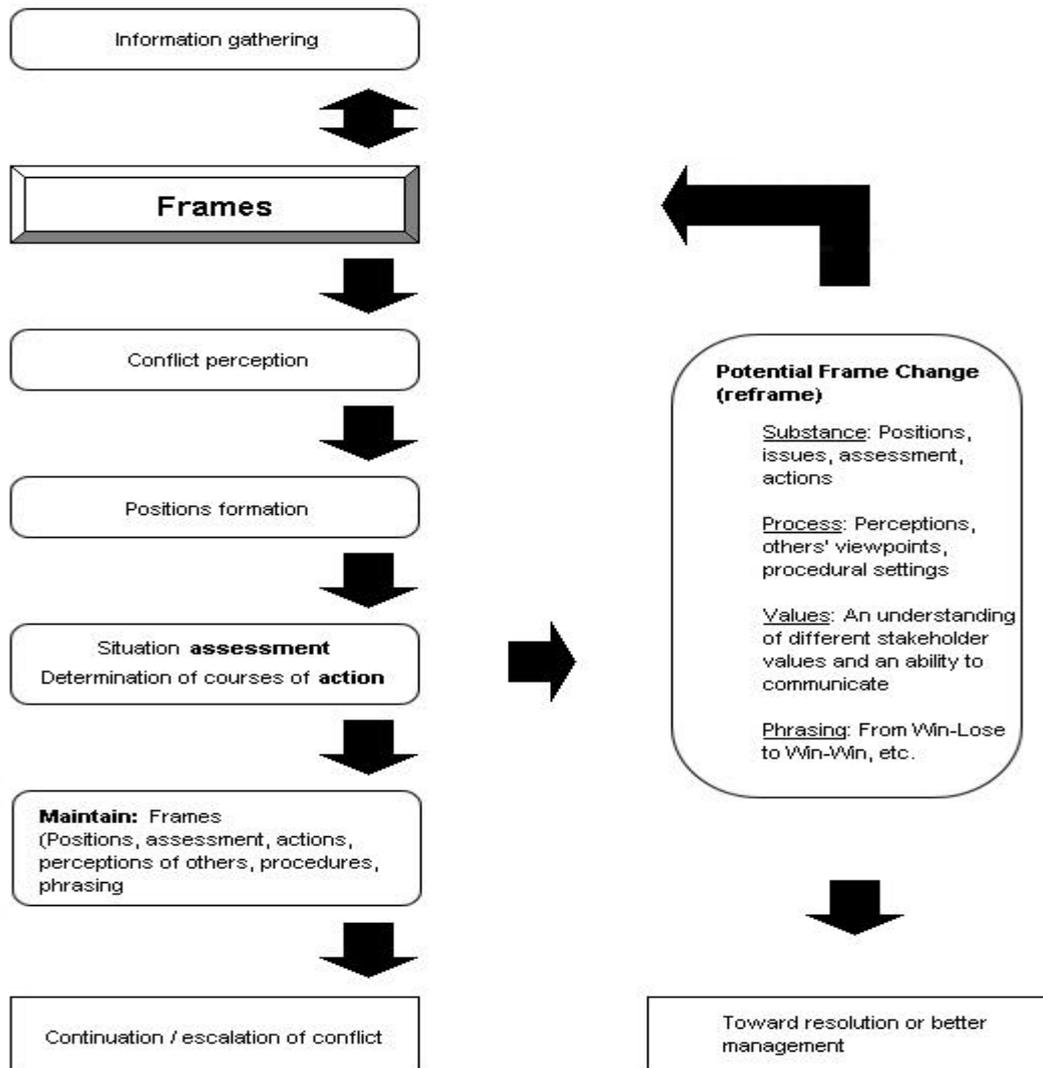
²¹ Why not establish a Peace Research and Training Unit in the Netherlands, for example located at the Human Rights and Peacebuilding Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or incorporated in the Conflict Research Unit of Clingendael? Focusing on e.g.: * Designing measures for value analysis for the government in times of pressure, helping to prevent 'groupthink' (Janis, 1989), and 'fundamental attribution error' (Jones and Nisbett, 1971), * Peace journalism (very important in discourse change!), * Non-violent approaches to security, peacekeeping, and governance * Training in creative non-violent conflict resolution and mediation skills for public schools students (including the design of textbooks), public officials, peacekeeping troops, etc. etc.

Annexes

Discourse school Trait	Sociolinguistics	Narrative analysis	Conversation analysis	Frame analysis	Discursive psychology	Foucauldian discourse analysis	Critical discourse analysis
Origins	Linguistics	Linguistics, social constructionism	Social constructionism, ethnomethodology	Social theory, symbolic interactionism	Social constructionism/ conceptual analysis	Foucault, post-structuralism	Linguistics, poststructuralism, neomarxism
Important researchers	Labov, Fishman, Ferguson, Kress, Cameron,..	Propp, Labov, Sarbin, Bruner, Riessman, McAdams, Gergen,..	Antaki, Kitzinger, Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson,..	Goffman, Gamson, Konig, Fisher, Rothman,..	Potter, Wetherell, Billig (rhetorical approach), Antaki, Edwards,..	Laclau, Mouffe, Parker, Fairclough, Hall, Burr,..	Fairclough, Van Dijk, Wodak, Teo, Kress,..
Level of analysis/ Methodology	Systematic data collection	Text analysis	Emphasis on analysis of spontaneous conversations	No real methodology, rather a way of classifying and viewing an opportunity or a problem	Emphasis on analysis of natural language use	Varying material: Conversational data, written texts, speeches,..	Varying material: E.g. text analysis, on three levels: genre, framing, sentences/words
Important assumption(s)	Language represents fundamental dimensions of social behavior and human interaction	Narratives rely upon historical, cultural, social conditions. Narratives do not reflect, but rather create what is true	Discourses are interactive accomplishments. Interaction is structurally organized. Context is constituted in/ through talk itself	Events, actions, performances, and selves speak not always for themselves but rather depend on framing for their meaning	Language contains the most basic categories people use to understand themselves, affecting the way they act and define their identity	Discourses are systems of knowledge (an object), cultural resources, powerful structures, and subject positions	Systematic asymmetries of power / resources can be related to unequal access to linguistic and social resources
Aim(s)	Understand and explain language variation through linguistic and social context	Investigate organization and development of narrative actions and actants	Study methods by which members of society produce a sense of social order	Identify the major cognitive schemata through which people interpret the world and communicate about it	Investigate people's methods of constructing versions of mental, social, material events and processes involved	Examine conditions of possibility, subject-positions, claims of power and knowledge,..	Study role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance

Figure 1: Frames and Their Role in Conflict Development

By Elliott, Kaufman & Shmueli (2003) on www.beyondintractability.org/m/framing.jsp



Note:

- *Substance:* Affects the way people view the world and its potential future states;
- *Process:* Affects the way people interact with other conflict parties;
- *Values:* Allows conflict parties to clarify the relationship between values and interests;
- *Phrasing:* Affects the way language is used by the parties in communicating with each other.

Annex 1: Ten Criteria for Distinguishing Discourses by Parker (1992)

1) *A discourse is realised in texts*

Discourse analysis begins with a text in which discourses can be identified.

2) *A discourse is about objects*

To which objects does the discourse refer? In describing those objects, treat the discourse of these objects as itself an object.

3) *A discourse contains subjects*

A discourse makes available a space for particular types of self to step in; it addresses the reader in a particular way.

4) *A discourse is a coherent system of meanings*

People employ culturally available understandings as to what constitutes a coherent pattern or topic. The next step is that of mapping out the world or ontology the discourse presents or implies.

5) *A discourse relates to other discourses*

In any text, it is likely that more than one discourse can be defined. The two discourses may be in dialogue, set as opposites or muddled together. Attempt to set possible contrasting discourses against each other and look at the way they construct different objects or the same objects in different ways.

6) *A discourse reflects on its own way of speaking*

Sometimes the speaker in a text is reflexive about the discourse. An example would be when the speaker says 'For want of a better word..'. Sometimes this goes as far as the speaker denying the moral implications of the world-view being expressed, thereby reflecting upon it as a discourse.

7) *A discourse is historically located*

Discourses are located in time and history. Methodologically, a further step would therefore be to look at how and where the discourse emerged.

8) *Discourses support (or are linked to) institutions*

Discourses are seen not as free-floating but as bound up with existing institutional structures (e.g., the state, the medical profession, business etc.)

9) *Discourses reproduce power-relations*

Dominant discourses privilege particular versions of social reality and hence certain ways of being over others. Analytically, one could suggest which categories of person gain and lose

from the employment of the discourse, and hence suggest who would want to promote and who to resist the use of the discourse.

10) *Discourses have ideological effects*

Analytically, Parker suggests analysts show how discourses connect with other discourses, which justify oppression, and also how these discourses facilitate the telling by dominant groups of the narratives, which use the past to justify the present.

Annex 2: Ten Guiding Questions when Doing Discourse Analysis by Fairclough (1989)

A. Vocabulary

1. What *experiential* values do words have?
 - What classification schemes are drawn upon?
 - Are there words which are ideologically contested?
 - Is there *rewording* or *overwording*?
 - What ideologically significant meaning relations are there between words?
2. What *relational* values do words have?
 - Are there euphemistic expressions?
 - Are there markedly formal or informal words?
3. What *expressive* values do words have?
4. What metaphors are used?

B. Grammar

5. What *experiential* values do grammatical features have?
 - What types of process and participants predominate?
 - Is agency unclear?
 - Are processes what they seem?
 - Are normalizations used?
 - Are sentences active or passive?
 - Are sentences positive or negative?
6. What *relational* values do grammatical features have?
 - What modes are used?
 - Are there important features of relational modality?
 - Are the pronouns we and you used and if so, how?
7. What *expressive* values do grammatical features have?
 - Are there important features of expressive modality?
8. How are (simple) sentences linked together?
 - What logical connectors are used?
 - Are complex sentences characterized by coordination or/ subordination?
 - What means are used for referring inside and outside the text?

C. Textual structures

9. What interactional conventions are used?
 - Are there ways in which one participant controls the turns of others?
10. What larger scale structures does the text have?

Note:

- *Experiential* values may identify the way “the text producer’s experience of the natural or social world” (p. 112) effects and is shown in a text;
- *Relational* values may identify the perceived social relationship between the producer of the text and its recipient;
- *Expressive* value provides an insight into “the producer’s evaluation (in the widest sense) of the bit of the reality it relates to” (p. 112). This should identify the relevant parties to the text’s social identities;
- *Connective* value can be identified, as its function may be to connect together parts of a text. Fairclough stresses that “any given formal feature may simultaneously have two or three of these values” (p. 112).

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