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Organisational discourse analysis

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Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the changes and innovations that we see in contemporary business organisations and their implications for employees. These changes and innovations involve new technologies, restructured product lines or services, and new managerial, professional and occupational tasks and responsibilities. What the research that is reviewed in this chapter suggests is that these developments manifest most dramatically in how employees relate to one another, what they say to one another, how much they say to one another, and how frequently they (have to) communicate with each other (Adler 2001; Child and McGrath 2001). For that reason, the focus of the chapter is on how changes within business organisations impact on employees in those organisations – not on the discourses of how people do business with one another across organisations.

To date, changes in business organisations have been discussed in terms of a rise in 'knowledge work' (Drucker 1993), or work that centres on the producing, sharing and applying of data and information. Businesses need 'knowledge workers' because of 'the informationalisation, networking, and globalisation of the economy' (Castells 2004: 218). But besides knowledge work being a domain in itself (like market analysis or stockbroking), knowledge work now increasingly permeates most businesses and all levels within a business, independent of whether their output is goods or services. Since knowledge often begets knowledge, the emphasis on knowledge work produces a positive feedback spiral. Knowledge creation leads to faster rates of organisational restructuring and production redesign, a phenomenon that is further fuelled by new technologies and in turn leads to new knowledge creation. Scholars have coined the term 'fast capitalism' to describe the rapidity with which these dynamics are played out (Armitage and Graham 2001; Gee and Lankshear 1995; Virilio 1986).

Fast capitalism has considerable consequences for who workers can be and what they can do and say. To accommodate increasingly rapid change, their traditional and static conceptions of time, self and work have to give way to ones that are more flexible. Think of the end of the 9-to-5 workday, the advent of flexitime, employment casualisation and the intrusion of work-related technologies into the home sphere. All these elements blur the boundaries between private self and work self. Castells sees these changes as going even further, because

of to the way interpersonal styles of being and interacting are gaining increasing significance in the business workplace. It is not only assertiveness, initiative and adaptability that are increasingly valued at work, because emotional and listening skills are now also gaining predominance: 'the new economy increasingly requires the skills that were confined to the private domain of relational work to be brought to the forefront of the management and processing of information and people' (Castells 2004: 228). So, next to knowledge work as explanation for what is happening in the new economy, emotional labour is a notion used to shed light on new ways of feeling and relating in the workplace (Hochschild 1983). As businesses shift into flexible production, ongoing restructuring and improvement, and the search for product uniqueness, the impact on workers is that they spend more effort and time on rethinking work processes and on building relationships: 'even factory workers are said to require interpersonal and decision-making skills previously reserved for managers' (Barley and Kunda 2001: 77).

In the remainder of this chapter, we begin by fleshing out how discourse analysis has approached these developments. In the section that follows we take some time to review the literature that deals with social and organisational change. Following that, we move on to consider empirical evidence to make tangible what that literature talks about, and to pinpoint domains where discourse research has thus far not ventured. Besides illustrating that employees talk about their work in ways that were quite uncommon just a couple of decades ago (Gee et al. 1996), the data also bears out that staff do complex kinds of emotional work to make possible new practices, such as teamwork and project tasks. Against the backdrop of this analysis, we will sketch what a discourse analytical agenda looks like for the future, and how it can benefit the study of twenty-first-century business discourses and practices.

Background: Business discourse in the context of increasingly rapid product and organisational redesign

At the most general level, business and organisational discourse analysis takes two forms. On the one hand, there is the kind whose principal concern is to make generalisations about what characterises business organisational texts. These texts can be spoken, written, visual or in any other semiotic form. This discourse analytic approach seeks 'to outline the typicalities, the patterns and regularities, as well as the constraints and boundaries' that are visible in such texts, and it 'grounds its arguments in empirically derived [linguistic] data to make its claims' (Iedema 2003: 27). Researchers who deploy this kind of discourse analysis tend to postulate what linguistic features of specific texts are typical of business organisational discourse, and what discursive knowledge is needed to be able to reproduce those texts.

On the other hand, there is the kind of discourse research that seeks out tensions and differences in what businesspeople and employees say and mean. This approach is 'oriented towards uncovering possibilities of organisational change and innovation' (Iedema 2003: 27). By highlighting tensions and contrasts in what people do and say, meanings are revealed that might otherwise have gone unnoticed, and that can contribute to opening up new ways of working and doing business (Boje 2001).

One influential proponent of the first kind of discourse analysis is Norman Fairclough. He began to write about social and organisational change in the late 1980s (Fairclough

1992). At the time, his analysis provided a turning point for the analysis of discourse in social and organisational life. He was able to link discursive change to social and organisational change, and articulate dominant trends in business–employee relationships. He linked the analysis of business discourse into his claim that more and more aspects of social and interpersonal life are put to the service of capitalist production and income generation, with business activity increasingly colonising the employee's lifeworld (Habermas 1987). Fairclough's reasoning privileged a critical, dystopian narrative: capital and business developments follow a predictable and singular trajectory, reaching across employees' social and interpersonal lives until these are fully subsumed to the interests of business.

Given the current rate of social and organisational change, it is now time to reassess the principles that Fairclough began articulating over a decade ago. While his analysis provides an important perspective on contemporary discourse, it appears that the ground has begun to shift, and that the central assumption that inspires his work – (workplace) change can be explained as an increasing colonisation of people's personal lifeworld – is increasingly difficult to defend. Recent research suggests that Fairclough's base premise – the zero-sum opposition between employees' and businesses' interests – has begun to unravel because of how employees are and want to be implicated in how modern businesses do business and in what they produce. To be sure, we do not discount capitalism's power to destroy environments and marginalise people (Knights and McCabe 2003), but we can no longer maintain that employment in a business or business entrepreneurship per definition equates with a denial of ethics and self (Spinosa et al. 1997).

More recent depictions of the contemporary business organisation therefore outline rather different trends. And it is here that we encounter our second kind of discourse analysis – a kind that does not concern itself purely with linguistic regularity and discursive predictability, but delves into complexity for traces of new trends (Iedema 2007). In contrast to the former kind, this latter discourse analysis avoids predisposing the researcher to framing their analysis of (business) practice in dystopian (or, for that matter, utopian) terms. That is, this second approach regards (business) practice as harbouring a multitude of tensions and contradictions that are likely to be beneficial in some ways, less so in others. This second approach to discourse analysis defers judgement about what it studies and how it studies it. It is not concerned with privileging 'power and control' as lenses for understanding business discourse, and nor does it centre on identifying 'what works' as the discourse analytical answer to business success. Instead, this approach foregrounds what has thus far remained unnoticed. It does so by 'reading worldwide developments in non-obvious traces' (Iedema et al. 2007). How does this work?

Let us look at how this second approach unpacks one of the characteristics that we noted above was common to contemporary businesses: organisational change. Organisational change tends to be legitimated with reference to continuous improvement, learning and market responsiveness. We change to make things better, to enhance income, or to extend our power – all of which are overly simple explanations (Chia 1999). In reality, change has become 'the name of the game'. Business organisations change because this has become the norm: not changing is no longer a viable business option. This is not just because products become obsolete faster than ever before, or because competitors are able to revise their production streams thanks to more flexible technologies. In effect, change has become a resource in and for itself, a way of identifying the business and its up-to-

date-ness. Nigel Thrift goes so far as to claim that 'No necessary progress or evolution is taking place in the field of business; rather the field is periodically restructured into a new configuration of profitability.' This new configuration, however, is itself 'nearly always unstable and can nearly always sustain only a certain amount of learning before events intervene and new patterns of learning become necessary' (Thrift 2004b: 876). On this analysis, business change is about establishing 'new kinds of economic credibility' (Thrift 2004b: 876) whose essence lies in being temporary.

In the modern business organisation, then, we find increasingly 'unstable interaction systems' (Deetz 2003). Employees have constantly to reinvent norms for working, relating, behaving and speaking. Here, it is difficult to locate clear trends and definable discourses as Fairclough could a decade and a half ago. What we can point to are *traces* of increasing frequency and intensity of communication in the contemporary business workplace. But what do such traces look like, discourse analytically speaking? Let us turn to two case studies to exemplify this analysis of 'non-obvious traces'.

Methodology: data collection and analysis

The first case study is based on research done by Hermine Scheeres during 1998 and 1999 (Scheeres 2004). As part of this research, she observed workplace practices in a local gaming machine factory, and this consisted of making regular tours of the factory floor, attending and tape-recording team meetings and training sessions. She also shadowed a team facilitator, building up a record of field notes in the process. The broader project of which this work formed a part sought to describe the communicative and discursive consequences of contemporary work and organisational change for employees (Scheeres 2004). For the purpose of the present discussion, we selected from among these sources transcript data of a problem-solving meeting involving frontline production staff.

Entrepreneurialising oneself

Extract 1 provides a record of a brief exchange during one of the frontline employees' team meetings. The team meeting is led by 'Carol', and it focuses on identifying problems affecting the production of gaming machines. The principle that underpins the meeting is 'problem-solving plus' (PSP), which is a technique enabling employees to address and solve recurring incidents.

Extract 1: Team meeting data; team leader Carol = C; TM1, 3, 5 and 6 = team members

1.1	C	Anyway. Let's just get back to
1.2	TM6	(laughs)
1.3	C	to do you want to go out there and actually talk to the guys doing the job cause
1.4	TM6	No.
1.5	C	The problem is locks missing or incorrect?
1.6	TM5	No I think we haven't finished last week the story.
1.7	C	What story?
1.8	TM5	What we started. Because (???)

1.9	TM1	[And we were we were supposed to bring more information about it
1.10	C	[Yep.
1.11	TM5	Well. er even even if there is a lock missing I will not get a er er er hand-written report of something like this probably let us know yeah we have the, we have some sort of a lock missing but at this stage, er er, I not know of any lock missing. Now what we were talking about last week somebody should come up with an idea of . . .
1.12	TM3	[Something
1.13	TM5	Something with the lock
1.14	TM3	[something changed.
1.15	TM5	Yeah someone from this group. I believe, in my view is we are fitting the locks in the wrong position. Always.
1.16	C	What do you mean?
1.17	TM5	I mean we are fitting the locks in the wrong place.

The extract shows the team leader named Carol trying to guide the meeting to talk about locks that go missing and that are incorrectly fitted (locks are needed because gaming machines collect money). Despite her supervisory rank, Carol's suggestion that team members should talk to the people who fit the locks (turn 1.3) is dismissed by TM6 ('No'; turn 1.4) and TM5 (turn 1.6). In less than fluent English, TM5 goes on to say that the meeting should return to a different PSP issue – 'last week the story' – that was left unresolved: formulating a production target statement.

In all, the exchange moves from Carol (the supervisor) suggesting what to do ('talk to the guys doing the job'), to TM5 and TM3 taking over and co-constructing a narrative around how the locks are fitted 'in the wrong place'. In 'taking the floor' (Edelsky 1981), team members TM3 and TM5 capitalise on the opportunity to speak. At the same time, because PSP provides a new forum requiring thus far little-practised ways of (public) speaking, the employees find themselves enacting new ways of being and relating. That is, asserting their viewpoints as employees is not equivalent to saying what they meant to say all along, but involves saying things they may not have been aware were sayable. What they appear to do here, then, is capture the moment in an entrepreneurial way (Spinosa et al. 1997). That is, they contribute knowledge that is important and specific to them ('something with the lock . . . something changed'), and give it relevance by inserting it into a general discussion about work process.

Extract 1 is emblematic therefore of how staff (are expected to) become mutually responsive and entrepreneurial in their approach to and definition of work. Being entrepreneurial involves articulating knowledge that helps improve their work and identifying new opportunities and solutions, such as fitting locks onto the gaming machines in a way that they know from doing the work is the 'right' place. Being responsive points to the increasing pressure to interpersonalise how employees relate to one another.

The interpersonalisation of business organisational discourse

The second piece of data will enable us to explore further the implications of new ways of working, such as participating in PSP meetings. It appears evident that saying new things carries significant personal consequences. How do I reconcile myself to being

or becoming different, or to saying things I was not brought up or trained to say? This question goes to the heart of the interpersonal implications of the increasingly rapid changes and innovations we see taking place in contemporary business organisations. To begin to answer this question, let us consider a stretch of interaction that took place in a large Australian textile manufacturing company, reproduced here from Lesley Farrell's original work (2000).

Like Hermine Scheeres, Lesley Farrell combined ethnographic observations with tape-recorded and transcribed in situ talk to understand the impact of organisational change on employees. She explains how the company's management is acutely aware of its increasingly precarious position in the global marketplace as competition from a number of neighbouring low-wage economies is intensifying. As part of a broader initiative to promote organisational learning, participative management structures and competitive innovation, the meeting brings five supervisors together from different sections of the organisation to talk about how to further these three aims. This initiative, Farrell notes, positions the supervisors as being responsible for successful interactions among 'their' groups of frontline employees. As extract 2 demonstrates, the meeting addresses the issues that this new responsibility creates for the supervisors.

Extract 2: Supervisor meeting

2.1	Ben:	we thought you know maybe maybe I should be the facilitator for Gay's group or something where I'm away from the people a bit and um
2.2	Sally:	yeah
2.3	Ben:	just have a background in what's going on but just sort of keep them on the right track and let them they've got to really then rely on each other instead of relying on the supervisor to do work
2.4	Gay:	well I think kind of in the groups that are gonna come along that's what's gonna have to happen. I mean I know the first one's that start off I think we have to go down this path to try to direct people onto the path and therefore we kind of will be in charge of the meeting but then we have to get people to start their own teams and us sort of just being a facilitator rather than
2.5	Joe:	the team leader
2.6	[. . .]	yeah
2.7	Gay:	I mean it's hard to get started I think that's where people are having trouble and that's why they're kind of looking to you Ben and you know things like that
2.8	Pete:	I'm not the only one I'm having trouble maintaining the thing
2.9	[. . .]	yeah
2.10	Pete:	I just can't maintain it at the moment you know a couple of days you know a couple of days crook there and you know just the amount of work that builds up it just goes back of the queue sort of thing it's shocking
2.11	Joe:	so what you really want is the um you've got a group you start a group and you want one of those people sort of come out and [. . .] facilitate the group

2.12	Pete:	just to maintain the group you know like just to keep it just keep the work flowing
2.13	Ben:	what I'm trying to get across
2.14	Pete:	cause
2.15	Ben:	is I'm too close to the people because I
2.16	[. . .]	yeah
2.17	Ben:	already go outside of the group and then I'm their supervisor outside on the on the floor where maybe if I was facilitating another group where I'm not I'm not above them you know I'm not their supervisor or whatever um I can go back to my job they can go back to theirs and they still um you know it's this their more their team than
2.18	Sally:	yours

In this stretch of talk, the supervisors are beginning to grapple with their growing number of responsibilities. These responsibilities include ones that are conventional, in so far as they have a supervisory role with regard to the procedural work that their teams do. They also include new responsibilities that are relational and that are (therefore) work-intensive. The supervisors' role as 'team leaders' and 'facilitators' centres on 'maintain(ing) the thing [group]' (Pete at turn 2.8). And it encompasses interpersonal tactics like acting as team leaders for someone else's team to create some distance and diminish dependence (Ben at 2.1; also 'I'm too close to the people' at turn 2.15). This ethos of being self-steering and self-reliant is again expressed in Ben's turn at 2.3 ('rely on each other instead of relying on the supervisor'), in Gay's turn at 2.4 ('people to start their own teams and us sort of just being a facilitator'), and again in Joe's turn at 2.11 ('you want one of those people sort of come out and [. . .] facilitate the group'). Then, at turn 2.17, Ben rearticulates his idea to separate his twin responsibilities of being supervisor of the work and facilitator of new relationships and initiatives.

There is an interpersonal intensity coming through in the therapeutic concerns that are articulated: 'away from the people', 'rely on each other', 'hard to get started', 'people are having trouble', 'you want one of those people to . . . come out', 'maintain the group', 'too close to the people', 'I'm not above them', 'they know it's more their team . . . than yours'. These discursive features suggest that the supervisors' focus on facilitative work involves disrupting traditional hierarchies (see turns 2.3, 2.4, 2.17) and ensuring the relational work goes on in the face of production pressures (2.10). As they articulate these sentiments, they are very open and honest with each other, confessing to having problems and concerns ('it's hard to get started' [2.7]; 'I'm having trouble maintaining the thing' [2.8]) and fears ('just can't maintain it at the moment' [2.10]).

Seen from a broader perspective, this meeting as a whole enables the supervisors to support each other through sharing feelings and experiences and offering empathetic comments (e.g. Joe at 2.11: 'so what you really want is . . .'). In that sense, the meeting is not made up of existing scripts, standard procedures and learned genres. Instead, it is a space where the supervisors explore, enact and invent new ways for 'going on' (Wittgenstein 1953). Thus, they meander from troublesome experience ('a couple of days crook there', Pete at turn 2.10) to troublesome experience ('I'm too close to the people', Ben at turn 2.15), as well as trying to express as yet unspoken thoughts (cf. what I'm trying to get across', Ben at turn 2.13). Progressively, Gay, Pete, Joe, Ben

and Sally invent possibilities for how to proceed, who to be, how to relate and what to say.

Discussion

As noted above, business and organisational change has been accounted for in two ways. First, researchers have described the growing prominence of knowledge work (Blackler 1995). As the analyses above illustrated, new business practices encourage employees to produce new expertises to capture value. This puts limits on the significance of hierarchy and rank, as well as blurring tasks and pre-existing roles and relationships. It opens up the way for those with ideas and initiative to create new opportunities for themselves, but it also produces uncertainty (Alvesson 1993). Second, much attention has been paid to the importance of emotional skills at work (Goleman 1995). Research has shown that new business practices can yield personal achievement and pride, but also result in stress, frustration and even anxiety (Fineman 1996, 2005) because of to the personal costs associated with producing emotions for the benefit of unknown others (Hochschild 1983).

Despite their apparent differences, these accounts – the rise of knowledge work and the intensification of emotional labour – closely parallel one another. Over and above pleasing clients and impressing managers with new ideas, employees are now also expected to invent new ways of being, doing and saying as part of how they work together. That means, in turn, that employees are co-producers of the current business environment, even though existing types of theorising tend to treat that environment as either external to employees (causing uncertainty) or as acting on them in 'unnatural' ways (by demanding emotional labour).

Seen in that light, concepts such as knowledge work and emotional labour fall short when asked to describe changes and experiences in the contemporary workplace. We would unduly stretch the notion of knowledge work in applying it to how TM3 and TM 5 co-produce their insight into the locks being wrongly fitted (extract 1, turns 1.13–1.15). By the same token, describing what TM3 and TM5 did as knowledge work would erase from view the affective energy that drives them to speak in front of the others (Iedema et al. 2006b). Similarly, the concept 'emotional labour' falls short in so far as it discounts employees' spontaneity and vitality, because it privileges emotional expectations and stresses imposed from elsewhere. We suggest that a different way of understanding employees' experiences is called for.

From this point on, then, we differentiate between emotion and knowledge on the one hand, and affect on the other hand. Knowledge and emotion are notions that position people's conduct as subservient to existing discourse practices – that describe reactive and cumulative behaviours, not innovative and self-motivating ones. Knowledge and emotion are notions that render invisible the extent to which people can act in unpredictable, non-linear and sometimes unexplainable ways. Affect, in contrast, helps broaden our appreciation of human vitality, creativity and interestedness (Massumi 2002; Thrift 2004a). Our adoption of the notion affect, then, serves not merely to confirm our view that employees are constantly confronted with having to negotiate and invent ways for 'how to go on' (Garfinkel 1972; Wittgenstein 1953). Importantly in the context of contemporary business, affect shifts our attention to the unusual and the unexpected, whether that manifests as creativity, innovation, surprise, excitement or intensity.

Our concern with affect serves to mark that, in the contemporary business, *the unexpected is increasingly expected.* '. . . [T]he value of productive activity is . . . found in . . . the play of uncertainty and the direct manipulation of affectivity' (Clough et al. 2007: 74). For Clough and colleagues, affect is at the basis of what produces (business) value. Of particular interest to our inquiry into contemporary business discourse is that affect reorients us from describing what predetermines, regulates or patterns employees' and organisations' actions, to appreciating the *openness* of the present, and the extent to which openness has become the new benchmark for 'being doing a business employee'. The importance of paying attention to the indeterminate nature of the present becomes evident when we think about how employees constantly negotiate and invent scripts and genres for new, attention-grabbing and noteworthy business practices. For us, the analysis of business organisational discourse cannot ignore this 'turn to affect'. This turn has important implications for how we study and characterise the discourses of and in the contemporary business organisation. These implications are explored in the concluding section of this chapter.

Conclusion: implications for discourse research in business

The turn to affect has moved research into areas where on-demand, experience-based conducts are more and more prominent. Examples are conflict resolution, open (honest) disclosure (of mishaps), innovative leadership, moral governance, performance improvement, career/personal development and business coaching. The prominence of these practices is evidence that 'affect is realised to be a very time-efficient way of transmitting a large amount of information' (Thrift 2004b: 878).

For discourse research this means two things. First, the focus of discourse research shifts from an objectification and in-depth dissection of discourse practices to presaging emerging practices and genres. Given that discourse practices are evolving at an increasingly faster rate, articulating generalising claims about specific practices or practice types becomes a tenuous activity: these practices are unlikely to remain stable for long, and it is difficult now to make firm claims about actors' relationships to and roles in these practices. It is more fruitful for research to focus on the emergence of affect-based conducts, driven by new policies and creative initiatives.

For example, in aviation we have seen how crew resource management has for some years now served as a technique for enhancing airplane personnel's attentiveness to colleagues irrespective of their rank and training (Helmreich and Merritt 1998). In public service organisations, we witness governmental approaches to risk management that rely on disclosure and 'being honest' (Lamb 2004). In business, there are moves afoot to render discourse practices more responsive to governance models, ecology impact assessments, and standards of gender equity. In these and related ways, businesses and staff are foregrounding affect, or openness to opportunities and sentiments embedded in the present. Discourse researchers need to pay attention to how these new conducts come about, how they are experienced, how they affect people, and how they evolve.

Second, discourse research needs to shift in terms of its methods. Where discourse analysis has for some time now privileged the analysis of texts obtained from the businesses where this work is done, the present interactive climate demands more and faster feedback between researchers, if not also more feedback between researchers and policy-makers, and between researchers and employees, as 'researchees'. Inevitably, this feedback needs to be as much affect-based as are the conducts that discourse analysis confronts in contemporary businesses. In the past, the researcher–business relationship was premised on the conventional discourse analytical approach that involved collecting textual evidence and devising theory-oriented conclusions 'from a distance'. This approach now risks being too one-sided, not sensitive to local complexities, too linguistically specialised, and therefore insufficiently informative for non-discourse analysts. In this regard, combining discourse analytic methods with ethnography will afford more immediate feedback, exchange and uptake (Engeström 2000). At the same time, ethnography is oriented to creating social and interpersonal relationships, much of which is affect-based. A discourse ethnographic approach is therefore potentially productive of alternative realities, as a result of the relationships it creates and works with (Iedema et al. 2006a).

Applications to teaching and training

Traditionally, our view of business culture was that we needed to align employees to predetermined procedural routines and emotional regimes (Schein 1983). This view is complicated now by businesses expecting employees to embody initiative and innovation. We have moved from considering good business to depend on the alignment and control of potentially unruly personnel, towards regarding good business to be contingent on inspiration, enthusiasm and intensity of participation (Thrift 1999). This shift has substantial implications for educators and trainers engaged in workplaces. How best can the affectualisation of work be taught, or more importantly, how is it learned? And perhaps even more fundamentally, how can educational institutions ensure there is a curriculum that 'covers' new ways of being a contemporary worker?

Conventional models of communication training tended to privilege the individual thinking subject who acts on the basis of cognitive schemas and emotional frames. No attention was given to the productive, creative and co-constructed dimensions of in situ practice (Barnes 2001) and distributed cognition (Hutchins and Klausen 1998). Understanding and engaging with affect-based practice in the twenty-first century organisation necessitates a different approach.

Given the close link between affect and change, teaching change is teaching affect. This means that curricula, in focusing on emerging discourses and practices, need also to address the personal implications for workers of these developments. Clearly, affect-based work is closely linked to the new ideal of 'the flexible worker' (Gee 2000). Education, teaching and learning in the contemporary business are therefore not about enabling employees to settle on new if rather different identities. Instead, what emerging pedagogic methods need to encompass is how employees can be enabled to *distance* themselves from identity per se through recognition that identity cannot be 'natural and necessary'. This, in turn, involves reconfiguring who people consider themselves to be, and accepting that what they do with ease is no longer a legitimation for who to be, how to speak, or how to do their work.

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The Handbook of Business Discourse

THE HANDBOOK OF BUSINESS DISCOURSE

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Foreword

Finally we have *The Handbook of Business Discourse*, a gift to the diverse lot of us who study discourse in organisational and professional contexts. Similar areas of research, such as organisational studies, have benefited from handbooks for some time. I've bemoaned the fact we have had none for business discourse and, at one point, even toyed with the idea of editing one myself.

Through the years, many a colleague or student has asked for materials to guide their research or teaching of business discourse. As is customary, I've provided sample syllabi, academic articles and discussion time. But I've always wished there were a more 'official' overview to recommend as well.

With tenacity and commitment, Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini has managed to enlist some of our most seasoned researchers to originate one. Not only does this *Handbook* suggest the scope of business discourse as a field of study, but it also codifies some of the approaches and methodologies used.

Academics researching and teaching business discourse share a curiosity about the operations of texts in organisational and professional contexts (and vice versa). But we come at it in different ways, thereby complicating attempts to characterise our collective output. I think Bargiela-Chiappini's edited *Handbook* helps us celebrate, validate and advance this endeavour.

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Special thanks are due to the advisory board, the independent reviewer and the many scholars and researchers who undertook the painstaking task of reviewing the work of their peers.

Finally, I would like to dedicate the *Handbook* to the contributors, without whom this volume would not exist.

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Transcription conventions

((text))	Comment
(.)	Micro-pause
(???)	Unintelligible text
(00.0)	Length of pause in seconds, e.g. (20.0) = 20-second pause
(text)	Action
[. . .]	Untranscribed text
[	Interruption or overlap
[text]	Sensitive text, e.g. references to names of people, financial figures, products etc.
{text}	Speaker description
<talk>	Talk that is slower or more 'stretched' than surrounding talk.
=	Immediate latching on
e::	Elongated sound
italic	Emphasis
underlining	Rising intonation

Introduction: Business discourse

Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini

On words and labels

A question that I was asked by some contributors and reviewers during the preparation of this *Handbook* was how *I* defined 'business discourse'. It is pertinent question, to which I think I have more than one answer to offer. The answers may or may not resonate with all the contributors to the *Handbook*, even though they have generously agreed to write for it. In so doing they have trusted in a project that is likely to keep the original question 'What is business discourse?' alive, while their collective work stands as a token of the vibrancy of this relatively new field of studies.

Defining 'business discourse' in a short and exhaustive answer is, I think, next to impossible. A bird's-eye view of the contents of the *Handbook* explains why. This volume seeks to chart a new territory of multidisciplinary scholarship where linguistics, communication studies, organisation studies, ethnomethodology, critical studies, sociology, international management etc. would come together under one banner, each to offer its distinct perspective on what *it* understood 'business discourse' to be. For many chapters, the editorial brief stopped at the contributors' guidelines, in an attempt to give the contributors enough room to present their material in such a way as to accommodate the priorities and distinctive character of the specific discipline or approach. This flexibility has been especially important for the essays in Part Four: Localised Perspectives, where varying degrees of development of the field, historical and geographical peculiarities and the status of the contributors – often writing as representatives of a relatively small academic cohort of researchers – have resulted in a mosaic of unique insights.

The impracticality – worse, the futility – of attempting to impose an a priori understanding of business discourse on such a rich and eclectic collection could have resulted, I believe, in stifling individual creativities in the name of a standard or norm that in fact does not exist even for the editor of the *Handbook*. If this sounds like an apology for scholarly anarchy, I should hasten to say that there have been attempts to engage with notions of business discourse, in which the editor was also implicated; I will rehearse some of the arguments in the next section. I suspect such endeavours are often motivated by the need to belong to an existing, recognised entity, or to make sure that an entity is created that provides the security of self-identification through self-labelling. There is also a sense of achievement in 'naming into existence' something that was not there before or elevating an obscure phrase to the status of a field of study. Either way, one is making a position statement by unfurling a banner on a patch of previously unoccupied, or unclaimed, territory.

This could be seen as a rhetorical move; Zachry (Chapter 5 in this volume) describes rhetorical analysis as a flourishing methodology with an illustrious pedigree. I doubt whether the invocation of, and argumentation for, business discourse would pass the triple test of the 'rhetorical appeals', the Aristotelian means of persuasion – ethos, pathos and logos (Zachry, this volume; see also Samra-Fredericks 2004). Perhaps what follows might just be analysed as a piece of (self-reflexive) demonstrative rhetoric in that 'it is focused on establishing the merit of something for the public . . . [and] is concerned with the present and that which is at hand' (Zachry, this volume, p. 71).

'Discourse' as a metaphor for dialogue

It is with a self-reflexive posture that we first approached British and Italian management meeting discourse over ten year ago (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1997), at one level seeking to show how pragmatic features were deployed in sense-making by social actors in the respective countries, but at a more ambitious level also setting the premises for the long-term, four-fold project of bridging the gap between:

- disciplines (linguistics–management studies);
- methodologies (pragmatics–organisational ethnography);
- academia and management practice (partnership research);
- systems of thought (challenging a western ethnocentric understanding of 'culture').

Meeting discourse was therefore a first platform from which to engage with management and organisation studies at a time when both were in the throes of the 'linguistic turn' (or discursive turn, for some). Linguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis provided the approaches and analytical tools that would enable the qualitative interpreter to get as close as possible to the processes of meaning-making in organisational interaction. As 'discourses' and their definitions proliferated in organisation and management studies, the opportunities for cross-disciplinary dialogue became more numerous, at least on the European scene.

The 1990s proved to be a fruitful decade for explorations of discourses in work and professional settings (e.g. Drew and Heritage 1992; Sarangi and Roberts 1999; Gunnarsson et al. 1997). The first definition of 'business discourse' that we proposed dates back to that period (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 1999). It was a contribution to the growing number of studies that used 'discourse' in their titles (e.g. institutional discourse, professional discourse) and as such it could be seen as an unconscious way of carving out a niche in a territory that was becoming quite crowded and contested. Our understanding of business discourse at the time was that it is a process of 'talk and writing between individuals whose main work activities and interests are in the domain of business and who come together for the purpose of doing business' (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 1999: 2). Writing in and for business was conceived as social action, an activity through which

organisational actors create understanding, meaning and knowledge. Leanings towards a moderate social constructionism laid the foundations for the next move, an exploration of what has become known as 'organisational discourse'.

My foray into organisational discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini 2004a) was an exercise in disciplinary dialogue, made possible by the interest in 'discourse' that I shared with colleagues in other disciplines. The contributions to the special journal issue that emerged from this encounter illustrate a range of understandings of 'discourse', partly influenced by the disciplinary background of the authors, but also highlight some important similarities, especially in relation to the effects of discursive practices on organisations and their members. The sociohistorical discourses of gendered identities are laid bare in a critical communicology approach to the study of airline pilot representations in the USA (Ashcraft and Mumby 2004). By focusing on the dialectics of materiality and discourse, communicology posits a notion of discourse which 'enacts and makes possible material changes in the world' (p. 26). Citing the example of an organisational meeting, Ashcraft and Mumby go on to argue that the event 'has substance only insofar as there is a discourse that enables us to enact, engage in, and make sense of such an event *as* meaningful' (ibid., original emphasis).

The tangible effects of the interplay between discourse and materiality are also examined through the rhetorical analysis of (dis)organising tales from two very different European cities, Rome and Stockholm. In a comparative analysis of the theatrical web of metaphorical meanings generated by the media (and the conniving citizens) in Rome, and the relatively 'flat discourse' of the Swedish media (reflexive no doubt of the much calmer temperament of its citizens), Czarniawska (2004: 62) concludes that metaphors are not only ornamental tropes, '[t]hey are part of organising processes, and not necessarily a positive one: metaphors can disorganise a city while organising the understanding of its citizens'.

Metaphorical language is also a tool of the 'discourse of managism' (Watson 2004: 75), the latter being a collaborative production of management consultants and managers. A distinctive component of such discourse is what Watson calls 'managerial pseudojargon' (ibid.), which in both its weak and strong expressions draws amply on metaphors. It is mainly in its 'strongly discursive usages' that managerial pseudojargon is 'implicated in attempts to mystify and neutralize the political and value dimensions of managerial work', to the extent that, Watson concludes, 'its mystification of just what managers are accountable for may lead to their ultimately being held accountable for very little' (p. 80).

A discourse analytical appreciation of the pragmatics of subordinate–superior decision-making unveils some of the features of organisational control that may be missed by a superficial reading of what is presented by management studies as participative decision-making (Yeung 2004). Metadiscoursal markers, rhetorical questions and pronominal shifts are among the linguistic devices that managers strategically deploy to exercise unobtrusive coercion. Here, again, 'discourse' constructs and maintains relationships (of power and control) with real consequences for people's lives as well as, presumably, for the economic performance of the organisation.

By the early years of the new millennium, business discourse as a mainly European endeavour had become an opportunity to revisit organisation studies through organisational discourse. Around the same time, business discourse was also meeting business communication and trying to learn lessons from the history and developments of this field in the USA. Reflecting on the lamented lack of a coherent disciplinary identity in business communication (Graham and Thralls 1998) and heeding the invitation to 'convergence' and 'commonality of purpose' (Rogers 2001), we proposed a 'partnership research' approach (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 2001), which consists of collaborative research between scholars in cognate disciplines but also between scholars belonging to traditionally distant disciplines, e.g. linguistics and management.

To that effect, and to offer a distinctive, though not necessarily incompatible, perspective from that of business communication, business discourse was defined as 'contextual and intertextual, self-reflexive and self-critical, although not necessarily political, [and] founded on the twin notions of discourse as situated action and of language as work' (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 2002: 277). 'Discourse' was seen as a symbolic point of convergence of an epistemological and methodological sharing between disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, which had already embraced the 'discursive turn' and might contribute in the long term to shaping business discourse as a new interdiscipline. From its inception, emphasis on qualitative research and scholarship has informed substantive developments in the field of business discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2007), underlining a preference for close examination of aspects of business practice in a variety of settings and, as some of the chapters in this volume illustrate, also looking at modalities other than text. In this sense, it may not be so fruitful to incorporate business discourse research into business communication (see Louhiala-Salminen, Chapter 23 in this volume), although this volume will no doubt stimulate reflection on the relationship between the two fields which will enrich both.

Interestingly, three contributors to this volume (Guowei Jian, Amy Schmisseur and Gail Fairhurst) have undertaken elsewhere the unenviable task of dispelling some of the confusion generated by the uses of 'discourse' and 'communication' in the domain of organisation studies. Their conclusion will appeal to some, probably many, of the contributors to this volume: '[w]hile there is an inextricably close relationship between discourse and communication, our view of the mix is that organisational actors operate *in* communication and *through* discourse. By this we mean that in communication actors co-create their subjectivities in the form of personal and professional identities, relationships, communities, and cultures through linguistic performances' (Jian et al. 2008: 314). I hope they will bear with me if, in my response, I chose to add to confusion instead, by treading the path of terminological ambiguity and forestalling closure (Bargiela-Chiappini 2008). There is at least one other notorious precedent I/we should own up to: entertaining parallel conversations with intercultural business *communication* (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 2003) *and* with intercultural business *discourse* (Bargiela-Chiappini 2004b).

The essentially dialogic nature of the 'discourse' of business discourse has thus far emphasised the catholic constitution of the field, its openness to dialogue with other fields, approaches and disciplines, but also its commitment to sustained engagement with important scholarly debates bubbling all around its permeable boundaries. Perhaps the most productive of challenges for business discourse in recent years has been raised by the concept of 'culture' and disputes on its interpretations.

The meeting with 'culture'

When looking for suitable labels for the parts of this *Handbook*, the most difficult to pin down was the one for the localised perspectives; the current label was suggested by Shanta Nair-Venugopal (personal communication) as 'evoking both place and space as well as grounded context'. It will become clear from reading the 'localised perspectives' why 'culture' alone cannot unlock local practices. Socioeconomic change, language planning, language policies, rhetorical and philosophical traditions, the colonial legacy and western management ideologies, to name a few, all concur in a complex characterisation of the interplay of discourse, business and human interaction in specific geohistorical *locales*. The 'East Asian scene' (Vietnam, China, Korea and Japan), while perhaps drawing on Confucianism, is also varied in many other respects. For example, we are reminded that Chinese business discourse has its origins in an ancient rhetorical tradition that continues to inform current forms of expression (Zhu and Li, Chapter 26 in this volume). Not only that, but the authors also bring to our attention recent efforts to compare ancient eastern and western rhetorical traditions and map their separate evolutions, a diachronic perspective that affords a deeper appreciation of some of the cause of the localised distinctiveness of today's business discourse.

History also looms large in the evolution of the multilingual workplace scenarios in Malaysia (Nair-Venugopal, Chapter 29 in this volume) and in Hong Kong (Cheng, Chapter 36), where the colonial legacy has led to very different linguistic configurations to those present in their neighbouring countries. In Malaysia, the struggles continue between supporters of 'standard' English, and those who argue for the proven effectiveness of the 'localised' version, Malay English, in workplace interaction (Nair-Venugopal, Chapter 29). If 'culture' is political (Wasson, Chapter 15), language planning is even more so, and it cannot be disentangled from the socioeconomic contingencies. Reprofiling a whole country as trilingual after decades of domination by a foreign tongue is central language planning on a grand scale. Sulemeinova and Burkitbayeva's account (Chapter 33) of the early stages in the formation of Kazakhstan's new trilingual identity touches on the issue of the difficult balance to be achieved in the new forms of business communication between the revival of the rhetorical tradition of Kazakh, the persistence of Russian as a dominant language and the increased influence of English. Research in business discourse in Kazakhstan offers the analyst the unique opportunity of charting the evolution of discursive practices as they emerge from the flux of language planning objectives and individual linguistic competences, corporate demands and resistance from persisting local practices and preferences.

In his challenge to ethnocentric stereotyping, Tanaka (Chapter 25) bursts open the myth of the predictability of Japanese behaviour in intercultural business communication. For example, silent behaviour in meetings is often remarked upon in the literature as a cause of misunderstanding; the Japanese are not alone in being singled out as inexplicably 'silent'. The Finns apparently keep them company (Piller, Chapter 24), but as the author points out, one only needs to dig a little deeper into the interaction (rather than generalising through essentialist categories) to find that some Finns come across as 'quiet' because they feel they are linguistically less competent than their counterparts.

Engagement with 'intercultural business communication'[1] forced us to problematise the locus of culture and to critique the use of 'national' culture as an ineffective and western ethnocentric analytical category. A more self-reflexive posture by qualitative researchers analysing intercultural communication in business settings means also more sensitivity to emic research and indigenous categories, which in turn requires dipping into anthropology and cultural psychology (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 2003). Re-examination of taken-for-granted conceptual vocabulary and dissatisfaction with the alternatives offered by intercultural communication prompted a redefinition of culture as process: hence, *interculturality*, which is 'the process and the condition of cultures-in-contact' (Bargiela-Chiappini 2004b: 29). The dynamic character of culture(s) is an essential consequence of contact between individuals and groups and the source of change of their practices over time through mutual influence.

Interculturality is a heuristic that seeks to capture 'culture in the making' in intercultural encounters; at an abstract level, it marks a conceptual shift from the (self-)imposition, on data and scholars alike, of western ethnocentric categories and dichotomies such as 'national culture' and individualism/collectivism (Bargiela-Chiappini 2005). It is a sign of healthy scholarly debate that 'culture' should continue to engage researchers and thinkers across disciplines; a recent volume enlists over 300 definitions of 'culture' (Baldwin et al. 2006) – 300 and growing . . .

Culture may be a fiendishly elusive word to define but its complexity does not lie in the word itself. On this point, Raymond Williams writes:

> Between languages as within a language, the range and complexity of sense and reference indicate both difference of intellectual position and some blurring or overlapping. These variations, of whatever kind, necessarily involve alternative views of the activities, relationships and processes which this complex word indicates. The complexity, that is to say, is not finally in the word but in the problems which its variations of use significantly indicate. (Williams 1983: 92)

Postmodern critique in anthropology warns that the construction of 'difference' between communities and identities rests on relations of power and inequality, which define what can be understood in relation to what (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 17). Culture, in the singular, has worked as a means of 'ordering and defining the world' (Mitchell 1995: 111), by 'bringing the "strange" into the ordinary' (ibid.) through ethnographic processes of localisation, exoticisation and integration, which have been seen to furnish the capitalist project. Furthermore, culture has been subjected to politicisation by constitutencies within and outside academia: for example, the 'cultural turn' in organisation studies has led to the manipulation of culture as an instrument of managerial control: 'managers are deploying both old and new ideas of "culture" in order to gain workers' active participation in new ways of organising production, profit and power' (Wright 1998: 12). The contestation of the ideology of culture(s) has led some anthropologists to the radical move of dropping the concept as the subject matter of their discipline (Street 1993; Yeongoyan 1986). In so doing, they might have anticipated Charles (this volume, p. 458) who muses: 'Clearly, culture as a concept needs to be revisited. Or should it be ditched? Is the new global business discourse cultureless?'

The shift from culture as a bounded object to culture as a process of co-constructed meaning creation has brought to the attention of anthropology (and organisation and management studies; see Samra-Fredericks 2005; Nicolini et al. 2003; Whittington 2006;

Balogun 2007) the concept of *practice*. *Cultural practices* have replaced individuals allegedly representing and enacting bounded cultures. Interculturality is therefore expressed in the indexical patterning of cultural practices which fine-grained analyses can capture in the instant of their realisation. Instead of looking at, for example, intercultural business negotiations through predictive behavioural categories or dichotomies (Bülow, Chapter 11 in this volume) based on generic cultural attributions, we could perhaps start anew and focus on how interactants 'do negotiating' and what categories they bring to bear on their collaborative work.

Cultural differences may then be seen to emerge from interaction and suggest themselves to the analyst and interpreter. Incidentally, it is naive to think that analysts could approach the 'data' without preconceptions or prejudgements; their background, disciplinary expertise, and prior experience of, and exposure to, cultural practices as active members of one or more communities will have 'primed' them. Self-awareness and self-reflexivity are therefore important attributes of the interpretative research process. They are particularly valuable when working in a 'multicultural' analytical team, to realise how behaviours which are similar on the surface are interpreted differently by different participants: for example, silence in Japanese business meetings may be a sign of attentiveness or simply the behaviour of junior interactants whose voices are not supposed to be heard; instead it is often mistaken for an expression of consensus by some western counterparts, with potentially disastrous outcomes for the meeting (Tanaka 2006; Yamada 1992; Fujio 2004). Here mention should be made of the import in cultural practices of management ideologies; western (Anglo-Saxon) ideologies which prescribe, among other things, what happens in meetings and negotiations are probably the most highly codified, elaborated, and widely taught, used and translated (Baum 2007; Czarniawska 2007; Tietze 2004, 2008). Alongside nonverbal behaviour (Hall 1973), they are the other 'silent language' of intercultural business practices whose deafening noise we in the west do not seem to be able to hear.

The significance of interpreting emerging 'cultural difference' as an interactional realisation rather than imposing off-the-shelf categories that obfuscate and prejudge the nature and significance of difference cannot be overemphasised (exemplary is the case of 'politeness'; Márquez Reiter, Chapter 13 in this volume). A prerequisite to intercultural analysis is self-knowledge, which also includes knowledge of the business practices in the analyst's own community. Second, when granted privileged access to intercultural business encounters, the analyst enters a relationship with the participants that seeks out similarities in the awareness of difference(s). In order to develop this attitude, time, empathy and willingness to learn from the other are the foundations on which to establish long-term relationships, whenever possible and practical, thus building into the research a longitudinal perspective that is often sacrificed in the name of quick feedback to the practitioners. In this perspective, the participants are valued as agents who can interpret their situation reflexively and take a stand; interpretation in this sense is 'constituted as a dialogue in which I try to understand how the other sees what I take to be at issue; it thus shows itself to be grounded in understanding the self-understanding of another about something we both relate to' (Kögler 2005: 264). The ethical advantage of such interpreting is that it avoids the reification of the other by the analyst but at the same time does not elevate the other above the self; this is a delicate balance to achieve and maintain in the 'analyst-analysed' relationship; the critique of hegemonic cultural categories also demands that we should be aware of powerful positionings as western interpreters of intercultural discourse.

Critical?

Reflecting on the target and the nature of the critique in critical management studies, two positions can be identified, namely the militant and the humanist: the first premised on commitment to the victims of corporate power, the second on the personal benefits (for management students) of developing as more self-reflexive managers. On this latter point, Samra-Fredericks's (2005) ethnomethodological approach illuminates power-as-done as well as advocating ethnomethodology (EM) as a form of research we can and should take into the classroom (Samra-Fredericks 2003a) . In this way, we converse across communities and bring to life our research as well as expose 'students' to modes of questioning the taken-for-granted.

Some of the chapters in this volume call for political engagement in campaigns of words and deeds (Alvesson and Willmott 1992, 1996). For example, Parker and Grimes advance a compelling argument for researchers and practitioners to attend to the in/visibility of race in organisations. They also propose a programme of decolonisation of management communication theory construction, research and organisational practice. Deetz and McClellan articulate their critical project in terms of 'understanding, distanciation and critique, and generative transformation' (p. 126), which aims to engender alternative discourses 'by directing attention to power relationships emergent through discourse, replacing consciousness with language as the focus of analysis, intervening in the discursive systems that marginalise alternative values and engaging in research as a communal process' (p. 129). The political aim of gender equality guides the feminist perspectives examined by Mullany, who recommends diversification of research focus to include non-white, non-western women, women in less well-paid, low or part-time positions, while various forms of 'gendered violation' (Hearn and Parkin 2006: 111, cited in Mullany, p. 222) call for a much more intense scrutiny of interpersonal relationships in all levels of the organisation.

One of the less apparent ways of 'doing' critical research is proposed by Iedema and Scheeres (Chapter 6). It seems to me that their advocacy of the all-pervasive, and yet usually ignored, human phenomenon of affect has potentially huge implications for what business discourse analysts 'see' when they observe human interaction. We are reminded how the political process of 'seeing' what has always been there, but has thus far been ignored or dismissed or silenced, should pierce the veneer of normalised discourses (Parker and Grimes, Chapter 22). One such discourse, in fact the dominant one, is the rationalist discourse of knowledge, underpinned by distance and objectivity (Sturdy 2003). In spite of convincing arguments elaborated in a range of disciplines which underscore the essential emotional component of rationality (e.g. Turner and Stets 2005; Kopytko 2004), business discourse research has not yet engaged productively with it.

For sociologists, the role of emotions in human societies is far from marginal: 'experience, behavior, interaction, and organisation are connected to the mobilization and expression of emotions. Indeed, one of the unique features of humans is their reliance on emotions to form social bonds and build complex sociocultural structures' (Turner and Stets 2005: 1). Why otherwise fine-grained analyses of organisational members at work should have ignored this defining character of human behaviour until recently is, then, a moot point; one of the few researchers who has sought to capture emotions in the making has used 'an ethnographic approach which places centre-stage recording *lived experience happening* across time/space' (Samra-Fredericks 2004: 12; original emphasis; see also Samra-Fredericks 1996a, 1996b, 2003b).

'Seeing' lived experience presupposes sustained involvement with the moment-by-moment detail of the realisation of local practices, right into the slippery depths of emotional discourses where participants' humanity is perhaps at its most vulnerable. This 'entanglement' of the researcher with the sensitivities and problems of the practitioners (Iedema and Scheeres, Chapter 6), be they managerial élites (Samra-Fredericks 2005, Chapter 7) or marginalised workers (Parker and Grimes, Chapter 22), requires an affective engagement which 'shifts our attention to the unusual and the unexpected, whether that manifests as creativity, innovation, surprise, excitement or intensity' (Iedema and Scheeres, p. 87).

In pragmatics, the role of affect has been recognised as one of the most important contributions by non-Cartesian approaches to cognition such as discursive psychology, social constructionism and distributed cognition. Methodologically, 'the integration of affect/emotion and pragmatics is the first and most important step towards a holistic framework or theory for analyzing linguistic data in context' (Kopytko 2004: 522). According to relational pragmatics, interactants monitor their own emotions, other's emotions and the perceptions of their own emotions by others (p. 536). Affect is ubiquitous, socially constructed and distributed, and influences linguistic choices at all levels, from phonetic/phonological through to pragmatic/stylistic; in turn, emotions in human interaction are modulated by social and cultural norms, power relations, gender, age, etc. (Kopytko, p. 539; see also Samra-Fredericks 2004, 2005).

This is not the place to discuss whether emotions subsume affect, sentiments, feelings, etc. (cfr. Turner and Stets 2005: 2); regardless of the terminological debate and the semantics of individual labels, the phenomena they denote seem to me to require a significant epistemological shift in the positioning of the researcher in the act of 'doing research'. No longer is she using a methodology to capture something outside of herself, while watching emotion-making as a detached and 'objective' spectator; instead, in order to share the emotionality of the people she is present to, she must be willing to be implicated sympathetically in the participants' lives. This commitment requires the mobilisation of the researcher's own emotional resources into sympathetic sense-making, thus bridging the gap between rationality and emotionality both ontologically and methodologically. The risks of such personal involvement are real but the insights afforded by co-participation are far greater, and illuminate thus far invisible (in business discourse research) yet pervasive aspects of interpersonal experience.

According to Iedema and Scheeres (personal communication), affect animates discourse analysis with an interventionist, or as the authors put it, 'entrepreneurial', spirit whereby it 'becomes a means of articulating how we enact our relationships, what we can learn from each other, and how together we can intervene in business realities and write about these activities for others elsewhere'. The political edge of discourse research that 'seeks out tension and difference' (Iedema and Scheeres, p. 81) chimes with the activism of 'seeing' race in Parker and Grimes (Chapter 22), the transformative agenda of Deetz and McClellan (Chapter 9) and the feminist advocacy of Mullany (Chapter 16). There is enough here to infuse business discourse research with the critical breath which reconnects it with human practices (Samra-Fredericks, 2005: Chapter 7; Samra-Fredericks and Bargiela-Chiappini 2008).

Business discourse as a verb . . .

The etymology of the word 'discourse' offers an opportunity to take these reflections one step farther. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) lists several meanings for both the noun and the verb. Starting with the noun, 'discourse' literally means 'running to and fro, conversation'. More enthusing are the obsolete or archaic meanings, e.g. 'narration, tale, account, the faculty of conversing, conversational power'. The meanings for the verb are no less suggestive: to run, move, or travel over a space, region, etc.; or, even better, in the obs. /arch. category we find 'to speak or converse with (a person), to talk to; to discuss a matter with, confer with; to speak to, address, harangue'. We can begin to expand the meaningfulness of business discourse and extend its epistemological horizons by conceptualising it as travelling across disciplines, methods and 'cultures', conversing and discussing with the scholars, researchers and practitioners, running to and fro challenging established notions and positions; subverting rather than settling, provoking rather than reassuring, and being stimulated by difference rather than aggrieved by it.

Speaking about the positive challenge of interdisciplinarity in business communication, Priscilla Rogers issues a healthy warning: 'Let's guard the language we use to define our role, lest we become victims of our own discourse. If we explain ourselves as outcasts in search of an academic home, lacking respect from peers and administrators, then we may eventually succumb to our own self-fulfiling prophecy' (Rogers 2001: 246). This volume shows that there are a few of us who believe, if not in the ambitious (impossible?) prospect of business discourse as an interdiscipline, at least in the attainable objective of a dialogue *across* disciplines.

. . . and the researcher as a composer

Most of the chapters in this volume contain implicit or explicit reference to the role of the researcher or analyst, while some highlight the disparity between the privileged positions of certain researchers (and their research) and the invisibility of others. Pacheco (Chapter 30) observes how research published in certain areas of the world never receives visibility outside of its linguistic boundaries. English as the language of international publishing is blamed for the 'invisibility' of much research that is published in other languages, but there is no easy, practical answer to this very important limitation, which, incidentally, affects many other multidisciplinary areas of research originating in the Anglophone area (e.g. politeness studies). Many international conferences which would be attended by researchers interested in business discourse, business communication or management and organisation studies tend to be in English, not to mention international conferences in pragmatics and sociolinguistics. What makes such events possible and popular among researchers, who generally benefit from their multinational character, is, paradoxically, the use of English as a *lingua franca*. English is not a panacea (see in this volume Gerritsen and Nickerson, Chapter 14; Piekkari, Chapter 20; Tanaka, Chapter 25) and may always give native speakers an advantage over non-native speakers, especially, but not only, in terms of the ideological baggage that educated native speakers can afford to take for granted; in practice, other languages can and are used in informal interaction at conferences and other international research meetings when multilingual speakers, given the opportunity, will code-switch to a language other than English with colleagues from the

same geographic area. At times, however, the explanation of invisibility is to be searched for elsewhere; for example, Montolío and Ramallo (Chapter 31) remark on the poor participation of Spanish researchers in an international conference on business discourse organised on their home ground.

Language restrictions (limited competence in English?), or, more likely, funding or travel restrictions, force many researchers to operate from the periphery of international networks; the role of the researchers who occupy privileged zones in such networks is to act as catalysts and bridges between the periphery and the centre and between institutional, geographic and disciplinary areas. The researcher then becomes a 'composer', an individual who puts together, makes up, forms, fashions, frames and constructs together with other researchers, wherever they may be located. This spirit of creative openness, curiosity and generosity has made this *Handbook* possible; indeed, collaborative ventures such as this volume are not only good for the growth of the field but also practical bridge-building activities. English has enabled participation by non-native speakers in this international project: in turn, I hope they will continue to be interpreters of business discourse (however they may choose to define it) in their communities, and in their respective languages.

The researcher as 'visible composer' also *outside* of the academic community is the model that many authors in this volume would perhaps consider as the ideal (Cheng, Kong, Pacheco, Zhu and Li, Montolío and Ramallo, Wasson, Mullany, Nair-Venugopal, Tanaka, Samra-Fredericks, Watson, Jung, etc.). Different levels of involvement are represented, or are advocated, in the *Handbook*, each depending on the author's circumstances: the range includes independent consultants (e.g. Chew), consultant-academics who regularly switch between fields and personae (e.g. Tanaka), academics who have spent extensive periods in the field and have also acted as consultants (e.g. Watson, Iedema, Scheeres, Piekkari, Cheng), others who have worked in organisations/business for a time and who have entered academia but whose research has led them back into companies (e.g, Samra-Fredericks) and academics who have carried out fieldwork in companies (e.g. Nickerson, Wasson, Gimenez, Mullany, Filliettaz, de Saint-Georges, Piekkari, Nair-Venugopal, Jung).

Consultancy positions (e.g. Piekkari, Chew, Tanaka, Watson) or 'shadowing agreements' (see Samra-Fredericks, Chapter 7 in this volume) almost always afford privileged access to sensitive data, which the researcher may or may not be able to use for research or teaching purposes. Even less intensive and extensive patterns of presence in the field give rise to practical and ethical implications with regard to the establishment of trust-based relationship, relationship maintenance while in the field and beyond, feedback on the findings and research integrity. Those of us who have done fieldwork in companies, and perhaps have not always had the benefit of personal contacts, will know how hard it can be to obtain that first meeting with a gatekeeper. The question 'What's in it for us?' will usually have been raised long before a meeting is granted, and in some important ways it will inform the whole dynamics of establishing one's credentials, assessing degrees of openness and availability, establishing who is likely to be or become a mentor, presenting suitable suggestions or ideas for discussion, etc.

Through these processes, the researcher becomes ever more implicated in a complex network of interpersonal relationships, to which real people with real lives and everyday problems bring their own unique understandings of the situation. Issues and identities are negotiated as the researcher is drawn ever deeper into a dimension where self-reflexivity is required in order to make space and time for a critical (self-)appraisal of the demands advanced by the business collaborators, as well as by the research activity itself. At times, (ignorance of) research findings may turn out to be potentially very damaging for the company's business; for example, the researcher-consultant may have the uncomfortable task of pointing out that certain practices are alienating sections of the staff or the foreign partner in a joint venture. Not reporting this information would be unethical of the researcher but reporting it may damage his relationship with senior management (Tanaka, personal communication).

The urgent need for applied research highlighted by some of the contributors (e.g. Cheng, Dulek and Graham, Charles, Pacheco, Montolío and Ramallo, Reinsch) needs to be balanced by concerns for the integrity of the research per se, as a source of knowledge to be disseminated to and through the academic community. Once again, the researcher as a composer needs to strike a balance between the expectations of the business partners and her responsibility to further knowledge beyond what may at times be business concern for quite specific, practical outcomes. In fact, there need not be a polarisation between the two dimensions of research, the practical and the academic. Where fusion seems to have been realised, to the benefit of both the companies and academia, is in the field of design anthropology (Wasson, Chapter 15). Here the researchers are practitioners, they are based in the companies for which they work and they publish state-of-the-art research in academic journals.

This introduction would have to continue for many more pages to do justice to the issues raised by the contributors to this volume. It is time to let the chapters speak for themselves, and to finish by mentioning three further important points. The first is the need for multimodal and multidisciplinary analysis in business discourse. Watson (this volume, p. 235) reminds us that 'language is everywhere but it is not everything', with those drawing on ethnomethodology and multimodal research agreeing on this point too (in this volume, Samra-Fredericks, Brummans et al., Garzone, Gimenez, Filliettaz and de Saint-Georges). Let us not forget about materialities, media, affect and nonverbal communication, among others. The second is the need for the business researcher-composer to concentrate her efforts on bringing 'east' and 'west' together, thus heeding calls for the dismantlement of what is one of the most persistent and divisive conceptual dichotomies (Hendry and Wong 2006). The third and final point, eloquently discussed by Parker and Grimes (Chapter 22), is the long overdue critical engagement with the invisibility of race (and the unquestioning attitude towards 'whiteness' and its effects on the practice of research), but also with the silence that surrounds the exploitation of too many workers in too many countries and sectors, whose voices are very rarely heard in the field of business discourse research. At the end of a presentation I gave in the early 1990s on the discourse of management meetings I was challenged by a linguist in the audience with a question that stays with me to this day: 'Why empower the powerful?' It is something for us all to think about, as we take self-reflexivity one step further and take seriously our commitment to a transformative agenda (cf. Deetz and McClellan, Chapter 9).

Note

1. I use 'intercultural' to refer to comparisons of cultures in contact, 'cross-cultural' to refer to comparisons of different cultures in situations of non-contact, and 'intracultural' to describe behaviour within a culture (Gudykunst 2002).

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