Discourses and refugees' social inclusion: Introduction to method and issues

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Abstract

Different frameworks guide our research. In this edition we are interested to see how the methodology of discourse analysis is useful for shaping policy in the context of refugees, and we have included work from a variety of researchers all of whom engage with discourses in the context of refugees. A sub-theme of this issue emanates from our collective experiences working in a broad range of disciplines, many of which have relied upon qualitative data collection and in turn the analysis of narrative. Narrative data and discourse analysis are two different, though inter-related, approaches that are commonly used in the social sciences, but often they are either confused or have little or no impact at the policy level. While this paper focuses on the issue of discourse analysis, other papers within the issue concentrate on the use of narrative in constructing meaning and recording the experiences of refugees in Western nations. It is important that readers are aware of both discourse analysis and narrative in terms of refugee studies.

Keywords: Discourse analysis; refugee studies; policy analysis; narrative and qualitative data.

Introduction

Discourse has a very wide reference within the social sciences. It has been used not only to describe very different types of research activities, but also very different kinds of data. Rather than canvass the broad ways that discourses are analyzed, we hope the inclusions we have in this edition demonstrate these in many ways for us. Our aim here is to begin by exploring how this area has developed and the philosophy underpinning it, and how it can help us to understand the plight of refugees and therein create a platform of social change for social inclusion. We will need to examine some practicalities of conducting discourse analysis in the social sciences, focused on using it as a method of data collection and analysis. We will make our arguments about the potential for benefits and some of the cautions to conducting discursive research. We will introduce how the premise of discursive analysis relates to refugee studies in particular, as well as outlining the papers that make up this special issue and their contributions to the debates and questions outlined above.

Discourse

In this paper the first obvious questions are: what is discourse, and then, what do we mean by discourse from a research perspective? No one definition of discourse should be sufficient, and many researchers over the years have debated and proposed various common sense definitions. Often the question is better answered in concrete terms of what is discursive data? In the most open sense, discourse can include all forms of spoken interaction either formal or informal, and written texts of all kinds. So when we think about discourse analysis for refugee communities, what we are referring to is the analysis of representations of refugees or their plight which can be easily observed in

any number of forums: on the news on TV, in newspaper articles about these topics or graffiti on your bus stop on the way to University, in a journal paper and other print media, in scientific papers, letters, policy documents and political speeches, or in any other pre-existing texts, recorded meetings, or simply by talking to a friend about refugees, or even (inadvertently let's say) listening in on the talk about refugees between strangers on a train. In each case, like it or not, you are 'reading' a discourse. These are naturally occurring materials and the advantage of using this form of data is that the researcher has little influence on the material, and from a discursive perspective it allows the researcher to select from the widest possible variations in accounts. Unobtrusive data, that which is found as naturally occurring in our social world through texts such as policy documents etc, are ideal for discursive analysis, and several authors in the present edition will show the power of analysing these.

What is discourse analysis?
Conversation analysts work with every speech act or utterance in any given sentence (see for example Antaki & Widdicombe, 1999; Hutchby & Woofitt, 1998). They use detailed techniques which are drawn from semiotics and Austin's (1962) speech act theory to examine texts traditionally at the person to person conversational level, but these techniques have also been usefully applied to examine the many discourses that populate and in turn construct our society more generally. Thus they aim to identify, unpack or de-construct prevailing discourses of oppression in texts such as those written, spoken in cafés, the mediated texts of newsprint, on talk-back radio, in government policy, and our very own academic texts. All of the 'umms' and 'ahhs' in-between formalised utterances, such as words, often can tell us more than the actual words themselves. For example, consider – this response to the question: Are you

racist? "ahhh, ummm, well…yes, no…", a curious response! Or the famous insertion of a small 'but' in "I am not racist, but". The 'but' means everything here. Conversation analysts don't want to omit, or lose, any speech act; their analysis is of each and any verbalisation and they argue each has important meaning. Thus we can examine the details of any sentence or, we can look more broadly at the overall structure of a piece of text or whole text and observe how it/the author shifts from one point to another. This is where discourse and narrative analysis often converge as we analyze how each utterance of the discourse functions for each speaker in each conversational turn; we note how these form into a plot line or story. However, for many there is often a broader analysis not at each and every speech turn, but by isolating broader pieces of text at the level of a sentence, primarily two or more sentences in any one interaction; and coding those similar pieces together for analysis.

Rather than search for textual themes per se, though this is fine, some identify the presence of structures in the text such as interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1990; Edley, 2001); ideological dilemmas (Billig, 1985, 1987, 1991; Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton, & Radley, 1988); subject positions (Antaki, Condor & Levine), or rhetorical devices. Guilfoyle & Walker (2000) in 'Dividing Australia into One Nation" focused on showing for example how a series of 'rhetorical devices' were used by the speech writers of Australia's short-lived One Nation Party leader Pauline Hanson. Often writers inserted 'extreme case formulations' (Pomerantz, 1986) to enter and debate some then politically and socially 'taboo' topics (Billig, 1991).

In her first parliamentary speech Pauline Hanson suggested that like 'millions of Australians' she was 'fed

up to her back teeth' and feeling 'swamped' by those who build 'ghettos':

Present governments are encouraging separatism in Australia by providing opportunities, land, moneys and facilities available only to Aborigines. Along with millions of Australians, I am fed up to the back teeth with the inequalities that are being promoted by the government and paid for by the taxpayer under the assumption that Aboriginals are the most disadvantaged people in Australia.

I and most Australians want our immigration policy radically reviewed and that of multiculturalism abolished. I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians. ...They have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate.

Another common rhetorical device used by Hanson's writers was 'three part listing' (Antaki, 1994; Atkinson, 1984) where subject categories such as 'Aboriginals, multiculturalists and a host of other minority groups' were effectively conjoined, to be divided from the mainstream moral majority, and thus made a legitimate target for political attack:

a type of reverse racism is applied to mainstream Australians by those who promote political correctness and those who control the various taxpayer funded 'industries' that flourish in our society servicing Aboriginals, multiculturalists and a host of other minority groups.

Further, her speech engaged in a 'stake confession' (Potter, 1996), freely admitting she would be labeled as racist only, in order to denounce her discourse as racist and attempt to reconstruct what racism is:

Of course, I will be called racist but, if I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country.

As outlined above, the term discourse has many inflections; it ranges from broad sweeping arguments about how society is constructed, similar to those Foucault has provided, through to the examination of fragments of texts for their structure. At these extremes and all between, analyses of discourse aim to reveal ideological structures present within texts and, not only show the presence of these but show how they are made, presented, structured, communicated, perpetuated, and, not least, 'managed'. If we are to be effective in analysing discourses to help shape policy for refugee communities, we need to take a further step, to not just reveal these texts and their structures, but do so to the point where we can also change them. As analysts of discourse we might suggest the discourses should be deconstructed and then reconstructed or changed. One concern is, rarely does our analysis of discourse help us to construct that change - to take action, to act on the suggestions that are implicit in our analyses of discourse, and make change. This is the key reflective point for our edition, and we will return to it at the end of this paper, but for this we need to define more carefully what we mean by discourse and its analysis.

The focus of discursive analysts is on how specific discourses function to actively and powerfully, as we have noted, constitute both the subjects and objects of our social world. These are our ways of understanding and categorising the world, ourselves and others, giving a meaning or an identity to them if you like, and this labeling can be seen as contingent upon the historically, culturally, and socially specific context of the individual, and the setting in which the interactions

occur, rather than being universal. Discourse analysis can therefore be understood as a way of examining people (our social world) in context by shifting the focus to the dynamic practices of social interaction. What constitutes the interactions between the discourse of refugee leaders and power laden policy makers for example? We ask how they speak to each other; in one to one interactions perhaps, at a meeting, or from afar via policy documents which refer to (construct) refugees. We shift to the very act of how any meanings (identities) are being created by us as humans, and in the case of refugees and policy-makers we ask how discourse analysis can be better constructed to inform policy and practice that is more inclusive and realistic of the refugee plight.

To turn further into the focus of this edition, let's take an example of what we mean by *actively* constituting the subjects/objects of our world. A refugee for example (in gross terms here, given the complexity of what is trauma) might complain of being traumatised. Discourse analysts will suggest that the definition of such seemingly passive and neutral, commonly accepted, terms as 'health' or 'illness' is not trivial. For a start, using these helps us suggest who in our society is healthy or ill. These very terms are actively constructed discourses. It is those who have power (and not medical practitioners, but governments, media, radio shock jocks, those in the community who are not refugees but who accept the prevailing common sense of what is a refugee) who can arbitrate over whether a refugee is healthy or ill, and thus which treatment or services they should receive.

For example, departments of health, under the previous Howard government (in power until 2007 in Australia), overlooked common definitions of illness, by incarcerating already ill (traumatised, grief stricken, disorientated) children into conditions which could only exacerbate their illnesses. What we saw within the Howard governments' rhetorical and thus actual treatment of refugees is thus a clear illustration of what we call 'subject positioning'. Refugees were positioned as subjects who were unlike us; criminals, illegal, queue jumpers, competitors for scarce resources, and so on, and these social constructions overrode any other social constructions such as - traumatised, grief stricken, disorientated. Once refugees were constructed in this way, certain actions were warranted over others – for example, imprisonment in reportedly horrific conditions. Would others who suffer trauma in 'our' community who are deemed ill be subject to these conditions? By their positioning as 'outside' of 'us' they were no longer subject to our accepted moral codes. This meant they were subject to treatments we would not apply to someone 'like us', in our in-group of good upstanding citizens, or even those of us whom had perhaps simply fallen on hard times. Typically, anyone who is 'like us', or is at least *liked* by us, reaps the benefit of our moral order, code or group norms, and would receive health care treatment which is accepted, such as removing them from any environment which negatively affects their health, or clearly exacerbates their illnesses.

As illustrated in the example above, much of what discourse analysts frequently work with consists of naturally occurring materials. But another form of data arrives from interviews that the researcher has created through contact with informants, via semi-structured and unstructured or conversational interviews. The advantages of using an unstructured interview for data collection is that potentially longer accounts of issues can be produced, since the informants are basically in control of the direction the interview takes. This also enables the

researchers' analysis of discursive patterns that may not have been created through a structured interview. For the semi-structured interviews the researcher is able to concentrate on a similar set of themes throughout data collection. This is advantageous when you have a number of informants and wish to address certain issues across all informants (for example if you want to see how they respond to the question "Are you racist?"). Unlike structured interviews, these themes do not need to be addressed in any specific order, and may often arise naturally during the course of the conversation. We do think researchers need to be careful about interview data and discursive analyses. If using interviews, the way to do this is to describe your research purpose very carefully and outline what your interview questions are designed to do. We will return to this point a little later once we know more about what discursive works tries to do.

Research Aims

The aim of research for refugees from a discursive perspective is to identify the way that we produce a particular reality for refugees at a particular time within a particular context. Discourse analysis places language as its topic of investigation rather than seeing it as a simple and passive medium. The best way to observe any discourse in use (and those of refugees are no different), therefore is to ask for what/whom does the discourse function. Discursive analysts are largely concerned with investigating and understanding how people *utilise* the available discourses within their cultural, social and political context to constitute, negotiate and interpret the world and themselves. It is a systematic study of the ways that people use the available discourses to guide their social actions during interactions in certain contexts. The focus also extends to examining the resulting social consequences from these interpretations.

Research Questions

Pulling both the critical and social constructionist perspectives together, basically our research questions for discourse analysis supporting refugee inclusion needs to give priority to discourse in any form (spoken or written), and then ask what it contains; how it is constructed, and then to suggest how both the content and how it is formed is related to function. That is, we try to link form and function to impact. The research questions that discourse analysts use and focus on are, then, broadly related to content, construction and function. For example, how is the discourse put together, and what is gained by constructing the issue, event, and/or subject in this way? How is the discourse being constructed and what has the speaker/writer (or, for example, graphic 'artist' if we are examining advertising on a bus shelter) achieved by constructing it that way? Another way to ask a research question is to ask what is at 'stake' for the writer/speaker (see Guilfoyle & Walker, 2000)? How does it function for them?

Here are some examples of research questions:

1. How is the social category of refugee constructed by (insert any government policy/agency right here), and what are the institutional and identity consequences and implications of different formulations (adapted from the study of Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003).

2. How are asylum seekers being constructed in the Australian print media, and what are the implications of these constructions and representations in relation to the 'Tampa crisis' and the 'children overboard incident' (Saxton, 2003).

3. How do young women who have sought political refuge construct and negotiate their own and others' subjectivities in the context of multicultural urban areas in Australia, and how are the intersection between subject positions and power relations of gender and ethnicity articulated in these young women's talk about style and tastes in appearance (adapted from the study of Malson, Marshall, & Woollett, 2002).

How Should Discourse Analysis Occur

So how do we go about conducting discourse analysis? There is no set procedure for producing your analysis from an archive, interview or transcript. Although some researchers do offer some guidelines for conducting discourse analysis (see Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001) these guidelines are not considered absolute or fixed step by step instructions. The process is guided partly by what we are looking for, and this is, of course, guided by our own research questions.

In general many look for things such as: What is being said? This seems to be a relatively simple question. Researchers should ask questions of policy that appears detrimental to social inclusion and analyse this text to identify and problematise the complex issues within its discourse that need to be resolved. But what is being said is always contextual and connected, produced by whatever surrounds it. Nothing is said without context. The question of what is said is more one of what context gave rise to it being said. In looking at what is said, we interpret its historical and cultural specificity, and we make an analysis of how a text is not neutral but motivated, or generated by a certain author/context. Guilfoyle (in press) argues that as soon as we link a text to its context, we can link it to effects. Guilfoyle & Walker (2000) argued that whatever Pauline Hanson and, in quick step, John Howard said about refugees, the effect of this was,

whether intended or not, greater social exclusion of refugee communities. The interesting thing was how easily a racist discourse flourished and how easily refugees became excluded. We were interested in what that said about the Australian social/cultural context at that time.

Or we look for things such as: What are the issues being discussed? We don't suggest avoidance of interview data, but caution that it adds a layer of complexity to any discourse analysis. If we analyse interview data, then we analyse it along with what is said, we need to also analyse that in context of what was asked. Commonly the interview issues being discussed have been defined and set by research teams, policy-makers and funding bodies. Their key terms are used in semi-structured interviews and are used to prompt the participants. This occurs in interview based (indeed all) social research because the text is a co-construction between participant and researcher. Thus we need to analyse the influence of the researcher/s and their questions as much as the responses, and this can influence the issues. If we use naturally occurring data, the researchers influence is still there, but maybe not as strongly.

There are also two ethical issues in analysing discourse in interviews of refugee communities. Firstly, related to the above discussion, when refugees are researched through 'interviews' they may feel that certain issues are taboo, or that they should only discuss important issues within their family or cultural groups. The bottom line is that issues are usually predetermined and this in turn reflects on the power relations between refugees and their host nations. Refugees may believe that if they do raise new issues in research, then they will be penalised or ousted in some way. In many ways the analysis has to contend with a self presentation in that light.

From our experiences working with and studying refugees, we have learned that many, already fatigued in their battle for human rights, claim to be 'over-researched; over-evaluated' and yet their words, voices, needs and complaints are never heard. Often interview research on the other hand will richly and vividly capture personal storied experiences through Phenomenology or Narrative of asylum seekers. To fully understand the plight of asylum seekers, what it means to be seeking asylum; we must hear these stories. Ranges of narrative methodologies help collect these stories. Each depends on the historical (and epistemological) position of the research(er), and arrives powerfully from feminist writers and critical researchers, and a hermeneutics and interpretative phenomenology of 'lived experience'. Both shape powerful interviewing techniques and rapport building, critically advocating participatory approaches, and journals are full of evidence that through these we collect and report stories of asylum seekers – powerfully. What separates narrative and discursive work often is the subtle shift to the study of the socially constructed nature of the narrative. This often leads to methodological choices. Often therefore we would not apply a discourse analysis to the 'narratives' of refugee communities, since we can easily identify what is socially constructing their text - trauma, war, rape. Do we really need to indentify the stake confessions, three part listings, and extreme case formulations, of refugees' speech in these cases? However, we note the need to apply it to the 'narratives' of policy per se, of policy makers, or of the media if we think they negatively construct refugee communities, as we do want to undermine those negative social constructions. The focus of discourse analysis should be less on personal narratives of the refugee communities, more on those of the host society/community, and the aim is to show whether the discourses of the host society (policy, media, and everyday speech) are welcoming / supportive, or whether their discourses exclude those welcoming / supporting structures.

With this research focus in mind, we have suggested that often the best way to analyse discourse is more simply to use unobtrusive data or, if interview data, not that of refuges per se. In these data we can observe just how naturally the mainstream authors of society draw on the mainstream culture's very own already socially constructed stocks of social facts. By connecting their argument to prevailing ideas which have been already been produced and well reproduced, and accepted within society, the politicians or their policy writers – using the discursive repertoires (see Potter & Wetherell, 1990) available within our communities - can claim that their policy, although harmful to refugees, is nevertheless necessary, hard to refute and, often, good old 'commonsense' and thus, valid. On one level we need to deny them that resource if the resource is being drawn upon to exclude refugees. Thus, as analysts we want to show just how policy makers can rhetorically use the prevailing commonsense of their community to their own political end. For example, here are some commonsense rhetorical phrases which, on their own are not noxious, but which have acted as repertoires for many in Australia, including policy makers, who want to argue refugees should be excluded:

- *You are your own worst enemy.*
- *If you don't want attention, you shouldn't go about wearing things that will attract attention.*
- *Nobody likes those who keep separating themselves from us, or don't want to be like us.*

- *Nobody likes someone who is greedy or wants more than others.*
- *It should be an even playing field.*
- *You can't change the past; or we can't turn back time.*
- *If one can do it why can't all do it; if I can do it so can you.*
- *If some can't look after themselves why should we pay for that.*
- *We can only do so much to help others; ultimately they have to want to help themselves.*
- *Society is always advancing – if you don't move with the times you will be left behind.*
- *Fuck off, we're full.*

A discursive analyst will also note any metaphors present in the text. For example, Guilfoyle (in press) shows how the discourse of assistance to Aboriginal people is metaphorically akin to helping a weak child that can't help themselves or is sulking or spoiled. This in turn is framed within a psychodynamic discourse which has been a powerful modernist discourse pervading society, and functions to deny systematic structures of racism in our society. It works by identifying racism as a problem of the victim, not the society. In a 'pseudo-Freudian' discourse, Aboriginal people are often labeled in many popular discourses as 'repressed', for example as harboring resentment for the past which prevents them moving on to being good citizens within our community. This discourse is a rhetorical one which functions rhetorically (intentionally or otherwise) to shift blame for the marginalities and impoverishment of Aboriginal people to themselves, 'they' simply need to get over it. This discourse then helps to ignore the wider social structures that marginalise and impoverish Aboriginal communities. Often discourses become socially constructed as common sense.

Powerful super ordinate discourses such as the modernist discourses of cognitivism and individualism continue to operate within our communities and our western societies. Through these reified discourses it then makes sense that Aboriginal people should 'just get on with it', and this is supported by a host of common axioms such as 'every person is responsible for their own actions or plight', 'we can't do it for you or hold your hand forever', and so on. Once again, this may be true on some level, but it also ignores the fact that many people's actions are constrained by their environment, history and contemporaneous situations which bind, restrict and affect them.

In the Australian context, the assistance provided to Aboriginal people is commonly resented, just as is that for refugees. The question for us as analysts is to both observe the presence of discourses such as these and then examine how they are resolved, in discourses such as mediated texts, government policy and everyday speech. In these discourses at least the following emerged very strongly and Guilfoyle (in press) shows how the combined force of these discourses warrants conclusions such as:

1. They are to blame for their own problems – they are causing the problems we can't help them with that – the cause of prejudice.
2. We can only offer conditional help: help only if we control or design the help they can have to shape their behavior (to be more like us).
3. We will include them as part of our moral code but only if they like act like us (some seem to be able to achieve that and can be included). If they are all like us then racism/prejudice is

removed.
No one should have special treatment - giving people special treatment is causing a rift between people – the cause of racism.

This edition
This paper has provided a brief overview of the praxis of discursive analysis; how we think that in some ways it diverges from narrative data in social science and other research contexts; and suggested to practitioners and researchers some insights into the oft confused terminologies and methods associated with discourse analysis and narrative data. The papers following that make up this special issue expand on these overviews, analyses, insights and methods and provide the reader with a comprehensive set of manuscripts that cover many areas of conducting research among refugees and humanitarian groups using both discursive and narrative data. Hopkins, for example, provides an exploration of the use (and misuse) of narrative in feminist and refugee research. She outlines her personal journey into the use of narrative and highlights the ways in which narrative can be used to have an impact at the policy and practitioner levels. Guilfoyle suggests that many researchers who share the aim of helping refugees converge on a critique of modernism, and the only way to transform modernist policy into something postmodern is to form relationships with policy makers at the very local level. Hancock, Cooper and Bahn also focus on the use of narrative, but do so from the perspective of an evaluation of a sports program designed to help refugees and humanitarian entrants integrate into society. They argue that the use of qualitative methods, and specifically narrative, were instrumental in evaluating a complex program, and in turn providing information to policy-makers, stakeholders and researchers to better implement the project in the future and to inform similar projects in

other settings. Northcote and Casimiro similarly provide a paper that is based on an evaluation of a sports program, but one designed specifically for Muslim women. Their paper goes further, arguing that the use of evidence-based research such as theirs should be better targeted at becoming research *for* policies rather research *of* policies.

Hudson-Rodd's paper takes an international approach, outlining how Australia has implemented laws and policies to defend the nation from asylum seekers and illegal immigrants. Her paper provides a broad overview of current international and national laws regarding refugees and highlights the discourse used to define refugees and in turn criminalise them as illegal immigrants, for example. Smits paper follows on from this by providing deep and meaningful insights into the terms used to describe asylum seekers attempting entry to Australia, and examines their experiences in detention centres from a discursive perspective. In her paper, Dandy focuses on the attitudes of the host community and provides a new way in which to conceptualise and analyse programs and polices that focus on refugees, and to help them integrate into host nations, but argues that similar policies and programs are required for the host communities as well, since they are ignored and their voices should have traction. Naidoo's paper shows just how the lack of appropriate cultural awareness and diversity in Australia's curriculum in essence further marginalises refugees, while Hannan, who also focuses on neo-liberalism in the education sector, argues that learning English as a second language is highly problematic and forces the children of refugees into a 'no win' situation, or limbo, where they are forced to be literate in English, but struggle with their native language at home. She argues that Australian policies do not recognise this problem and that refugees have little voice in

terms of addressing these policy issues. We hope you enjoy reading these discourses as much as we have enjoyed putting them together.

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