# Introduction to Special Issue on 'Discourse: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Identity'

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## 1. Background and Aims

This Special Issue is part of an on-going multidisciplinary exploration of discursive approaches to identity. The papers included were selected from the 18 presentations given at a one-day colloquium by the same name that was organised by the editors at the University of Sussex on 18th November 2016. The event whose sub-topic was 'Reflections on Representation, Identity and/or (Non)Belonging' was the first in a series designed to bring together scholars who use discourse in a variety of disciplines (the next colloquium is planned for 2018). The colloquium attracted both young and well-established discourse analysts and the enthusiasm they showed indicated how timely the initiative was and how much a discussion on interdisciplinarity is needed. Like CADAAD itself, with its emphasis on critical approaches to discourse *across* disciplines, both the colloquium and the present special issue aim to start a conversation between different areas of knowledge and research and challenge the artificial boundaries between them.

With the advance of scientific knowledge and the consequent specialisation of expertise, scholars have become increasingly aware of the necessity to make connections between different fields and compare different methodological approaches in order to answer important questions. If we step outside our own area, this is already being addressed explicitly. For instance, in a critical review of the literature on interdisciplinarity in the area of health services, Aboelela et al. (2007) illustrate the usefulness of such interconnectedness with the example of studies on the negative impact of tobacco on lung disease; showing that these findings were not sufficient to develop suitable programmes to discourage people from smoking and, besides medicine, further research was needed in other areas such as risk assessment or motivation (Aboelela et al. 2007: 330). Even more interestingly, Aboelela et al.

(2007: 331, their emphasis) refer to the definition of interdisciplinarity by the National Institute of Health (NIH):

> [Interdisciplinarity] *integrates the analytical strengths of two or more* often disparate *scientific disciplines* to solve a given biological problem. For instance, behavioral scientists, molecular biologists, and mathematicians might combine their research tools, approaches, and technologies to more powerfully solve the puzzles of complex health problems such as pain and obesity. By engaging seemingly unrelated disciplines, *traditional gaps in terminology, approach, and methodology might be gradually eliminated*. With roadblocks to potential collaboration removed, a true meeting of minds can take place: one that broadens the scope of investigation into biomedical problems, yields fresh and possibly unexpected insights, and may even give birth to new hybrid disciplines that are more analytically sophisticated

Similarly to Aboeleda et al.'s call for interdisciplinarity for research in the health sector, the papers in this special issue show the benefit of a focus on discourse analysis in a number of different fields, each of which addresses the macro-theme of identity. Discourse analysis (DA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the exploration, following Michele Foucault, of the 'different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice' (Fairclough 2003: 3) are not the exclusive propriety of linguistics. They are effectively used in many disciplines that believe in the crucial role of language and study speakers' and writers' different discourse realisations from the structure of conversation, to semantic and syntactic patterns or pragmatic preferences. By combining one or two disciplines and going beyond one's own area of academic competency, we discover limitations of our own field of research and expand our vision by taking into account other and new perspectives.

The Colloquium at the University of Sussex brought together researchers from a wide range of (potentially overlapping) disciplines that use discourse analysis, such as media studies, anthropology, history, linguistics, politics, law, psychology, gender studies, medicine, education and more; the present selection provides a sample of such rich variety. We hope that the series (and this resulting special issue from the first event) will lead to greater understanding of how discourse is conceptualised and approached across disciplines and reveal opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration.

## 2. Content of Special Issue

In this issue, the work on discourse analysis across disciplines is reflected in the variety of areas within which the authors work: psychology (Lee, Bruffell, Goodman), law (Reznik), translation studies (Walker & Karpenko-Seccombe), linguistics (Mooney, Robles, Reznik), journalism and media studies (Piazza & Lashmar).

However, rather than reifying potentially disciplinary affiliations, it is more interesting to look at the discourse tools employed in the various analyses and the understandings of discourse that are used in the papers. These include: Foucauldian notion of discourse (Lee), CDA approach drawing particularly on the Discourse-historical Approach (Reznik, also Mooney), stance as identified through discourse presentation (Walker & Karpenko-Seccombe), multimodal critical discourse analysis (Piazza & Lashmar), interpretative phenomenological analysis (Bruffell), conversation analysis and ethnomethodological approach (Robles).

Variety is also present in the different text types addressed in the contributions: semi-structured interviews (Bruffell, Lee), books (Mooney), media discourse (Walker & Karpenko-Seccombe; Piazza & Lashmar), courtroom discourse (Reznik), naturally occurring spoken conversation (Robles).

Most salient, given the topic of the special issue, are the different aspects of identity investigated in the issue (and note that these areas of interest do not cluster on disciplinary lines, thus illustrating the need for a multidisciplinary vision):

- self-construction (as member of an in-group through the practice of gossiping, Robles; as a young but good mother in a mothers' community, Bruffel; as an ethical actor operating drones for the good of the country, Lee)

- other construction (as morally good or bad: Reznik on guilty or innocent constructions in court; Walker & Karpenko-Seccombe on Putin and the representation of his speech in translation; Piazza & Lashmar on the BBC's discursive construction of Jeremy Corbyn through words as well as suprasegmental and facial communication)

- comparison of self vs other as ethical subject (Lee)

- other construction (addressee/second person – Mooney on how Get Rich books encourage readers to shift their identity to acquire the 'right' attitude to reality)

It is particularly salient to note that in discussing issues of identity, all the papers identify some kind of moral/ethical judgement by those doing the identity construction. It is recognised by the several contributions that identity construction is not a neutral exercise; on the contrary it is associated with issues of power and social control. In line with the spirit of CADAAD, therefore, the papers highlight how discourses can be constructed in a way that (dis)favour particular parties as in the case of the representation of such political figures as Corbyn or Putin, defendants in court or successful capitalists. Such recognition of the role of power is not only visible in other-representations; it is also present in the analysis of the identity construction of those social actors like young working class mothers who have to fight the bias and stigmatisation that mainstream society attaches to them.

The duality between a self and other construction and hence identity in interaction and as representation is the criterion the two editors have chosen to organise the papers in the issue. Robles and Bruffell open the collection focussing attention on the self and how actors construct themselves through talk; Mooney follows as she addresses the reader and investigates identity construction in a pseudo-dialogic situation; Lee's paper is next as the author contrasts the self-construction of the drone operator with society's representation. On the other-construction front are the papers by Walker & Karpenko-Seccombe, Reznik and Piazza & Lashmar. Goodman ends the collection with a detailed description of a discourse analytic methodology within the field of discursive psychology. This kind of explicit, student-oriented guide is relatively rare, and may constitute the first step in improving our understandings of how discourse analysis is actually performed in different disciplines. The organisational choice of the papers is deliberate in that not only proposes an organic and cohesive way to move from one sub-theme (self) to another (other) but more importantly avoids the risk of reasserting a disciplinary division when we want to start looking across such artificial boundaries.

## References

Aboelela, S.W., E. Larson, S. Bakken, O. Carrasquillo, A. Formicola, S.A. Glied, J. Haas, and K.M. Gebbie (2007). Defining interdisciplinary research: Conclusions from a critical review of the literature. *Health Services Research* 42(1, Pt 1): 329–346. Available: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1955232/. Last accessed 04 September 2017.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.