1 Introduction

This supplement expands the introduction to qualitative approaches to language analysis in Chapter 6. It offers additional details on the three designs discussed in that chapter, along with additional references for further study.

Language is central to qualitative research because of the preference for working with words rather than numbers. In many cases such words are analysed for what they can tell us about what is happening in some or other situation. You might study a corporate annual report, for example, for information about what the company has been doing, or collect interview data in order to learn about participants’ experiences in a particular situation. In this way, language is treated as a resource through which we can learn about the world beyond. An alternative approach is to see language itself as a topic for analysis. Instead of analysing the corporate report for what it tells us about the company, we might instead analyse it for what it tells us about how the company communicates with its shareholders, how it presents itself and uses words and images to achieve certain effects. In this section we will look at three different qualitative research designs that investigate language and language use as a topic rather than a resource. Each takes a different perspective on language, and other symbols, whether verbal or written and uses a different basic research design to achieve its aim.

2 Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) is a variant of the (quantitative) content analysis approach we introduced in Chapter 6. The expression content analysis is used in a variety of ways in
the context of qualitative research but we will use the term QCA to refer specifically to an approach to analysing text that retains the quantitative content analysis preference for systematic analysis through classifying textual material by following a methodical, sequential procedure in which a coding system and the rules for applying it are developed separately from their application to the bulk of the material to be analysed (Mayring 2000, Schreier 2012). QCA researchers working in this way also share quantitative content analysts’ concerns about validity and reliability, although recognising that some variation may be needed in the absence of statistical analysis of the data (Graneheim and Lundman 2004). Where QCA differs from quantitative content analysis is in its greater emphasis on developing the coding system from the data rather than primarily from prior theory, a greater emphasis on the importance of context and interpretation of meaning along with a recognition that frequency may not always be the best indicator of importance when analysing the content of the text (Mayring 2000). The systematic analysis approach does, however, mean that QCA can be extended to include quantitative analysis of the data if appropriate.

These similarities and differences are reflected in Figure 1 which shows key steps in QCA. As with other research designs it begins with the formulation of the research question which guides selection of the textual material to be analysed. Development of the coding scheme involves identifying concepts in the data that are relevant to your research question, defining those concepts and determining rules for when and how to code them in the material being analysed. The coding scheme can draw on existing theory but in QCA would also normally include codes developed directly from a sub-set of the data, following the sort of procedures for thematic analysis discussed in Chapter 14. The resulting code scheme should be captured in a code book similar to that shown for quantitative content analysis. Application itself involves a two-stage process of segmenting the data into appropriate units of coding and coding on the basis of the coding scheme. Once coding is complete, inter-rater reliability should be checked using procedures similar to those outlined for quantitative content analysis prior to drawing out your conclusions and presenting the findings. Presentation can make use of text-based matrixes and tables used in other forms of qualitative analysis (Chapter 14) but may also involve some level of quantification such as frequency counts and the use of charts and graphs to display them.

Like quantitative content analysis, QCA can be used to analyse both verbal and visual text material in either paper or digital format. Its primary application is the systematic description of the meaning (manifest or latent) in situations where it is important to recognise that
‘meaning is often complex, holistic, and context-dependent’ (Schreier 2012: 13). As described here, QCA is well-suited to analysing documents and other media, such as websites. If doing QCA you should be careful when drawing conclusions not to go beyond what your data will support. If you analyse company reports, for instance, you would need additional data if your goal is to say something about what the companies actually do as opposed to what their company reports depict them as doing.

Figure 1 – Key steps in qualitative content analysis

3 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis represents a very different approach to analysing language compared to QCA. The term discourse is used in a wide variety of ways in research and this is reflected in different forms of discourse analysis. In this section we will focus on a version of discourse analysis that has been influenced by the work of the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault who drew attention to the constitutive power of discourse. Rather than passively reflecting reality, discourse actively constructs meanings for it:

‘Discourses do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or “constitute” them; different discourses constitute key entities (be they “mental illness”, “citizenship” or “literacy”) in different ways, and position people in different ways as social subjects (e.g. as doctors or patients) and it is these social effects of discourse that are focused upon in discourse analysis’
The constitutive role of discourse means that discourses are implicated in issues of power: a dominant discourse can serve to legitimate a particular social order by making it appear the natural way of things through the way it is constructed in talk and imagery. Different social groups may have different levels of control over discourses; powerful elites, for example, may have greater levels of access to and influence over discourses than marginalised groups (Van Dijk 2001). Dominance is not guaranteed however, and discourse analysts are also interested in how discourses change over time, how different discourses combine with other discourses and possibilities of resistance.

One approach to analysing discourse that seeks to investigate its social effects is critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA provides a method for tracing the relationships between text and talk and wider social relations, practices and structures (Fairclough 2010: 419). It is ‘critical’ both in the sense of looking to expose the ways in which language is implicated within relations of power and dominance and in the sense of advocating social change. In order to achieve this CDA brings together both the social and the linguistic aspects of discourse. This can be illustrated using Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimensional conception of discourse in CDA comprising:

- Text. The detailed analysis of the text (verbal, written and visual) in order to understand what it is trying to do and how it is trying to do it. For instance, how are specific words used to highlight some issues or downplay others within the text?
- Discursive practice. Analysis of the processes of production, consumption and distribution of the text within particular social contexts in order to aid interpretation and to understand the linkages between the text and wider social practices.
- Social practice. Analysis of social practice in order to explain the effects of discourse on social practice and social practice on discourse. Of particular interest here is how discourses are reproduced or transformed, which discourses are or become dominant, which ones are or become marginalised and the implications for social and power relations.

An important concept within CDA is that of intertextuality. This idea highlights that discourses do not exist in isolation from other discourses and that in their discursive practices people draw upon more than one discourse in particular contexts. Intertextuality thereby
helps to explain how discourses are transformed over time and in different social situations, a process known as recontextualisation (Fairclough 2010: 422).

Fairclough (2005) argues that CDA can productively be used to understand the discursive component of organisational change such as how new discourses emerge, how a particular discourse becomes dominant or how a dominant discourse is enacted in the organisation. Doolin (2003), for example, explores how different discourses were employed during a change management programme in a hospital in an attempt to reconstitute clinical care as ‘patient flow management’ and doctors as ‘clinicians-as-managers’. The latter conflicted with a view of the doctor as ‘medical professional’ and the management role was resisted by clinicians. More details on CDA and other forms of discourse analysis can be found in the further reading section of this chapter, while Research in practice 1 gives an example of the application of CDA.

**Research in practice 1 – Example of critical discourse analysis**

**Recontextualising self-help in post-socialist Slovenia**

Erjavec and Volčič (2009) use CDA to analyse the appropriation of discourses of self-help into management discourse in post-socialist Slovenia by applying Fairclough’s (2010) idea of recontextualisation to articles in a management magazine. In the face of social change, the authors argue, self-help discourses ‘provide citizens with instructions on how to understand these changes, and how to adjust and empower themselves’ (Erjavec and Volčič 2009: 176) and have proven highly popular in Slovenia. For their analysis, Erjavec and Volčič (2009) use 28 articles on management and ideas from the Slovenian magazine *Manager*. They show how the articles borrow words and metaphors associated with self-help such as ‘energy’ and ‘self-development’ (and variations such as ‘self-growth’, ‘self-regulation’ and ‘self-transformation’). In the process, the discourse of self-help is recontextualised into a discourse of management. At the same time, they argue, traditional functional understandings of management are redefined and endowed with the language of self-help. Management becomes ‘all about negotiating positive and productive energy in a company’ while ‘fundamental business strategy’ becomes ‘development of a pure positive energy’ (*Manager* magazine, quoted in Erjavec and Volčič 2009). Self-help becomes the ‘solution to any current management or social problem’ (Erjavec and Volčič 2009: 123). Reflecting on these developments, Erjavec and Volčič suggest that they reinforce ‘a belief in the primacy and autonomy of the individual’ and thereby tend ‘to normalise the existing social situation by creating and training autonomous, self-responsible and self-governing individuals for the (neo)liberal capitalist system’ (Erjavec and Volčič 2009 139–40). In this way they seek to demonstrate how the discourse of self-
help functions ideologically within post-socialist Slovenia.

4 Conversation analysis

Although it is sometimes classified as a type of discourse analysis, our third approach to analysing language is a very distinctive one that focuses on talk in interaction. Known as conversation analysis (CA), it studies how talk is organised sequentially during the course of social interaction. Characteristics of CA include (Titscher et al. 2000: 117–8, ten Have 2007: 9–10):

- A focus on oral communication involving more than one person
- Fine-grained analysis of detailed transcripts of language being used in naturally-occurring situations
- Local understanding of context in which the analyst seeks to understand an utterance in relation to the sequence of interactions that preceded it
- Macro-social phenomena are only recorded when demonstrably relevant to the speakers’ understanding during the course of the conversation

Although conversation analysts can and do draw on a body of knowledge about talk in interaction, there is a preference for inductive, data-driven rather than theory-driven analysis. As Wooffit describes it:

‘It is important to emphasise that the goal of conversation analysis is not to furnish an academic or “outsider’s” reading of some conversational sequence, but to describe the organised interpretations that people themselves employ in the moment-by-moment course of conversation’

Wooffitt (2001: 56, emphasis in original)

A distinctive feature of CA is its attention to detail when preparing transcripts of recorded conversations. Unlike many interview transcripts which are often very simplified versions of actual talk, CA uses a wide range of transcription symbols to capture the richness of real conversation, including pauses, overlapping talk and changes in intonation and emphasis. Table 1 shows a selection of these symbols whilst Research in practice 2 shows some of them in use (note that there are minor variations in the conventions used). Conversation analysts may supplement their audio recordings with video imagery to record body language or other aspects of an interaction that may otherwise be lost.
Table 1 – Conversation analysis transcription symbols (based on ten Have 1999 and Wooffitt 2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td>The number in brackets indicates a time gap in seconds</td>
<td>A: that was (0.5) interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(. )</td>
<td>A very short pause (less than two-tenths of a second)</td>
<td>A: that was (.) interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>Non-verbal activity</td>
<td>A: here we go ((hands over form))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(word)</td>
<td>Unclear fragment of talk: the word represents the transcriber’s best guess</td>
<td>A: I got home really (late)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Overlapping talk; the first bracket indicates where the overlapping talk begins, the second where it ends</td>
<td>A: I was planning to talk [to you] about this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Two square brackets indicate that speakers start a turn simultaneously</td>
<td>B: [I see]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORD</td>
<td>Upper case indicates a section of talk noticeably louder than those around it</td>
<td>A: that was NOT clever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↑↓</td>
<td>Higher (↑) or lower (↓) pitch in the talk immediately following the arrow</td>
<td>A: that was ↑ interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; &lt;</td>
<td>The talk surrounded by the inequality signs is noticeably quicker than surrounding talk</td>
<td>A: that was an &gt;ah ha&lt; moment for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>word</td>
<td>Underlining indicates speaker emphasis</td>
<td>A: that was interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:::</td>
<td>Colons shows that a speaker has stretched out a sound or letter; the more colons the more stretched</td>
<td>A: o:::::kay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>A rising intonation; it does not necessarily indicate a question</td>
<td>A: that was interesting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>A dash indicates a sharp cut-off to a word or sound</td>
<td>A: turn lef- no right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>,</td>
<td>Continuing intonation</td>
<td>A: one, two, three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>··hh</td>
<td>The hs indicate a breath. If prefixed with a dot an in breath is meant, if there is no dot an outbreath is meant. The more hs the longer the breath</td>
<td>A: hhhh finished</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Close attention to the fine-grained detail of interaction is also a characteristic of CA’s analysis procedures. CA’s ‘fundamental concern’ (Wooffitt 2001: 55) is with the analysis of sequentially ordered talk and in particular sequences that have regular properties. One example of this is the idea of an adjacency pair which involves two sequential utterances that are adjacent, produced by different speakers and in which the first utterance requires a particular response, or range of responses. Offering a greeting, asking a question or issuing an invitation, are possible examples, in which the first utterance would be expected to be followed by an appropriate response (e.g. returning the greeting, answering the question or accepting or declining the invitation). The significance of this from a CA perspective is that the first utterance creates an expectation about what type of utterance should follow. The relationship between the two utterances is therefore a normative one: the second utterance should be of the appropriate type given what preceded it. If it is not, further conversational action may be required to repair the situation, for example, by repeating or rephrasing a question. Detailed analysis of this kind allows conversation analysts to show how the sequential ordering of talk is ‘not an arbitrary occurrence, but the realisation of locally [i.e. during the conversation] constituted projects, rights and obligations’ (ten Have 1999: 114–15). CA can thereby contribute to our understanding of how social reality is constructed, managed and sustained through the process of everyday interaction.

The label conversation analysis and the emphasis on naturally-occurring talk may suggest that the primary concern of CA is informal conversation but CA has in practice been applied to a wide range of other settings, including what is referred to as institutional talk or institutional interaction. Applications have included strategising (Samra-Fredericks 2003), political speaking (Atkinson 1984) and using standardised forms in service encounters (Moore et al. 2010). We present a further example in Research in practice 2 which shows CA being applied to street vending. More details on CA are to be found in the further reading section of this chapter.

**Research in practice 2 – Example of conversation analysis applied to a sales exchange**

**Streetwise sales and the social order of city streets**

*The Big Issue* is a weekly magazine that is sold on the streets in the UK by people who are homeless and who apply to become vendors and can keep the profit on the sales. Llewellyn and Burrow (2008) used conversation analysis techniques in a study of the interactions between a *Big Issue* vendor and passers-by, thereby contributing to an understanding of ‘streetwise sales’. Data were captured using
video-audio recording and the author presents both CA-style transcripts and photographic imagery in the write up. The following detailed transcript (symbols as Table 1) is one example of an interaction with a passer-by who has bought a copy of the magazine (cover price £1.50 at that time) with a £10 note. The vendor is counting out the change:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vendor:</th>
<th>four, five, six, seven</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>ǂeight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Passer-by:</td>
<td>that’s fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Vendor:</td>
<td>arh’s the’fine? Arh bl[ess you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Passer-by:</td>
<td>[yeah]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>(3.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Vendor:</td>
<td>thank you very much, thank you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In their analysis of this interaction, Llewellyn and Burrow (2008: 575–6) draw attention to a number of points. They highlight, for example, how the vendor counts back the change, presenting the passer-by with a choice about what to do; the word ‘eight’ is said with a rising pitch and the vendor hands over the eight pounds. At this point the passer-by says ‘that’s fine’ which is taken as an indication that no more change need be given back. Thus the vendor sells this copy for £2.00 rather than £1.50. As Llewellyn and Burrow explain, the phased return of the money did not force the passer-by to decline the change due but it did ‘generate distinctive sequential possibilities (a slot where such action could be performed) and, potentially, new normative considerations. The passer-by is placed in a situation where they are awaiting not £8.50, but (a homeless person to present them with) fifty pence’ (Llewellyn and Burrow 2008: 576).

5 References


