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LEAD ARTICLE

Heterogeneous knowledge: Trends in German discourse analysis against an international background

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This contribution maps the complex field of discourse analysis in Germany by situating its major currents and putting them in historical perspective. In a first step, it presents the major intellectual sources, such as (post-)structuralism, pragmatism/interactionism as well as hermeneutics, which have served as a backdrop for the establishment of discourse analysis as an interdisciplinary field since the 1980s. In a second step, it takes a closer look at the intellectual conjunctures in the social sciences such as Critical Theory and systems theory before turning to the discourse analytical tendencies that have emerged since the

1980s in the light of Foucault’s reception in Germany. Finally, it discusses the features of heterogeneous knowledge discourses. As against top-down studies of political discourse in France and bottom-up investigations of everyday discourse in the US, many discourse analysts in Germany focus on knowledge production as a multi-leveled process involving texts and contexts. Therefore, discourse is seen as a heterogeneous object constructed in the interplay of language, praxis and knowledge.

Keywords: discourse analysis in Germany; social sciences; linguistics; discourse as language; praxis; knowledge; hermeneutics; interactionism; (post-)structuralism

Introduction: the long history of discourse analysis in Germany1

While ‘‘discourse’’ commonly refers to the social production of meaning, discourse analysis commonly deals with language, practices, and knowledge at the intersection of language and society. Discourse can designate a monologue, a conversation between a given number of people or a public debate among large communities. Depending on their theoretical or methodological orientations, discourse analysts can adopt a descriptive or a critical stance on the objects under investigation. They can have recourse to qualitative and/or to quantitative methods. Discourse can be taken as an interactive process in a face-to-face situation or as an ideological formation on a societal level. While the term ‘‘discourse’’ is used in many theoretical contexts, it is sometimes synonymous with most general concepts of the social sciences and humanities such as ‘‘communication’’, ‘‘meaning’’ and ‘‘culture’’.

Even though the label of ‘‘discourse analysis’’ is a post-war creation, its

intellectual and theoretical roots reach far back into the nineteenth century. Thus, when discourse analysis began to be established as a field in the late 1960s and 1970s, it took shape against the background of various intellectual orientations that had

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developed long before discourse became the object of systematic investigation. While US-based social scientists had been versed in pragmatist thought and the French scene had had a long formalist tradition, historical-philological traditions had been a hallmark of the German humanities. Therefore, many scholars had been interested in questions of meaning long before discourse analysis was established as an interdisciplinary field in Germany in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Receiving many important impulses from outside, notably through the reception of discourse theory from France and the Anglo-American world, ‘‘German discourse analysis’’, i.e. the debate among German-speaking representatives of various strands of discourse analysis in Germany, must be seen as a hybrid theoretical terrain where different theoretical strands have come together.

This contribution attempts to map the many strands and tendencies of discourse analysis in Germany today. In the first part, I will trace some of the major theoretical orientations of discourse analysis as an interdisciplinary field which has brought (post-)structuralist, interactionist as well as hermeneutic-interpretive approaches to the social production of meaning into productive exchange. By presenting these ideal-typical orientations as a general intellectual backdrop for many contemporary discourse analysts, I will try to account for a field whose epistemological roots reach far back into the nineteenth century. In a second step, I will delineate some of the post-war conjunctures such as Critical Theory and systems theory which have emphasized the role of communication in the social sciences. In the light of Foucault’s ascending interdisciplinary importance, a number of discourse analytical approaches have been put forth in both the social sciences and linguistics since the

1980s, which will be examined more closely in the third, fourth and fifth parts on current discourse analytical developments in linguistics and in the social sciences and some typical problems in the cross-disciplinary debate on discourse. In the conclusion, I will point out some of the hallmarks of ‘‘German discourse analysis’’ by discussing the features of what I call heterogeneous knowledge discourses. Against top-down studies of political discourse in France and bottom-up investigations of everyday discourse in the US, many discourse analysts in Germany focus on knowledge production as a multi-leveled process involving texts and contexts. Therefore, discourse is seen as a heterogeneous object constructed in the interplay of language, praxis and knowledge.

Three sources of theoretical inspiration: hermeneutics, pragmatics, structuralism

In Germany, the debate on discourse did not begin to take shape until the 1980s. Yet, the question of meaning and knowledge had always played a central role. Thus, hermeneutics had been a dominant orientation in theology and philosophy, letters and history as well as in the social sciences since the nineteenth century. The basic idea of hermeneutics is to take meaning as an interpretive product of sociohistorical practices rather than as the timeless property of a universal knowledge or truth. Today, most German discourse analysts take every effort to distance themselves from hermeneutics, which is often seen as lacking in intellectual appeal. However, there are not many discourse analysts who do not follow the hermeneutic project broadly understood. As opposed to a few early pioneers of discourse analysis (such as

‘‘meaning-free’’ distributionalism), most contemporary discourse analysts (including many pragmaticians and (post-)structuralists inside as well as outside Germany) prolong basic hermeneutic intuitions by taking meaning as a sociohistorical

construction. Generally speaking, discourse analysts are interested in how the social world is constituted as a meaningful one.

Therefore, hermeneutics, alongside with pragmatics and (post-)structuralism, can be cited as one of three major general orientations making up the hybrid theoretical background against which discourse analysis has developed in Germany. Many contemporary discourse analysts have criticized the humanist epistemology and the romantic idea of humans being embedded in a community of interpretation. However, the revolutionary idea of the hermeneutic project should not be forgotten, namely the idea that the word needs to be interpreted. As such, the word cannot interpret itself and is devoid of meaning outside its context of utterance. Hermeneutics thus questions the idea of a meaning given once and for all. Whenever we want to understand our world, we enter the unstable terrain of meaning where one tries to find one’s way around by means of ever ambivalent and illusive signs and language.

As few discourse analysts overtly subscribe to hermeneutics in a narrow sense

(but see hermeneutic tendencies in linguistics such as Hermanns 2007), which tends to consider method as an interpretive art against a horizon of shared meaning, hermeneutics is sometimes seen as the tradition the least close to discourse analysis. Yet, hermeneutic ideas underpin the ‘‘turn to the actor’’ that the German social sciences saw during the 1970s in the wake of Weber’s comprehensive sociology (1978), Schutz’s life-world phenomenology (1972), Adorno (1976) and Berger/ Luckmann’s sociology of knowledge (1966; see parallel developments in history Koselleck 1979). Together with interactionist microsociological strands, these strands have helped establish the universe of qualitative social research without yet dealing with discourse properly speaking.

The other two theoretical orientations contributing to the formation of discourse analysis as a field are pragmatics and (post-)structuralism. For ‘‘pragmatics’’ understood as the interdisciplinary field of using texts in context, language necessarily implies a social activity. Meaning is not just there waiting to be correctly understood; it needs to be negotiated, ratified, and appropriated in a process in which the actors come to assign each other certain positions, identities, and intentions. In order to deal with the double contingency of communication, the actors need to solve complex interpretive problems. In this view, society is no structured reality that determines what actors can do, say, and think. Nor is language a fixed code of grammatical rules that need to be carried out. The problem for the actors is that a meaningful order is precisely what is missing. Therefore, the actors need to actively construct order with their practical interpretive competence. As a consequence, communication is seen as a process which calls for creative solutions at every step. Order emerges as the intended or unintended result of this process in which the discourse participants position each other and are positioned according to certain rules and practices.

If we choose ‘‘pragmatics’’ as a (somewhat arbitrary) umbrella term to designate the numerous action-oriented approaches to communication, three strands of pragmatics can be rapidly distinguished: (1) process-oriented, interactionist or praxeological strands which focus on the sequential organization of discourse in the line of, for instance, conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics, (2) ‘‘contextualist’’ strands investigating settings, genres and/or cultural knowledges, and (3) text-oriented strands highlighting the formal markers reflecting discursive activity in written texts. Following this broad definition, pragmatics is a field

comprising interpretive social scientists, pragmatic, applied and cognitive linguists as well as philosophers of language.

While pragmatic approaches tend to privilege oral communication in face-to-face situations, many discourse analysts work on written texts, especially those from the

‘‘French’’ tradition of discourse analysis. In France, discourse analysis had consolidated as a field in the wake of the structuralist controversy as early as in the 1960s. Structuralism attempted to apply the model of formal-structural linguistics to social and cultural objects. With pioneers like Michel Foucault and Michel Peˆcheux, the ‘‘French’’ notion of discourse as symbolic structures, institu- tional practices and communicative mechanisms operating on a societal level has crucially informed the international debate on discourse. In Germany, Foucault has been received as a major representative of poststructuralism, a label which is unknown in France. To sidestep this terminological problem, I prefer the (again somewhat arbitrary) term of ‘‘structuralism’’, which refers to the third and probably most paradigmatic orientation of discourse analysis.

Generally speaking, structuralism deals with a complex meaningful world by

‘‘deciphering’’ its underlying rules, principles and structures. The structuralist objective, therefore, is to explain and discover the constitutive rules which allow the users to form an infinite number of variants from a finite number of semiotic elements. Meaning is an effect of these rules which the individuals may not be conscious of. Typically, structuralism posits a break between the spontaneous and subjective meaning as it is experienced by the members of the linguistic community and the formal operations of meaning production. Departing from the primacy of the signifier over the signified, structuralists typically insist on the opaque materiality of language whose meaning cannot be simply read off from its surface. They refuse to center the production of meaning in the autonomous speaking subject which they consider as an effect of the play of linguistic differences. Meaning, therefore, exceeds the subject’s attempt to control what it means to say. In France in the late 1960s, the structuralist enterprise was adopted by pioneers of discourse analysis like Foucault and Peˆcheux, in search of a systematic theory of what can be said and thought in a society at a given moment.

In Germany as well as in the Anglo-American world, these currents are known as poststructuralism. As against actor-centered approaches, poststructuralist ap- proaches can be grouped according to two different methodologies. Differentialist approaches generally describe meaning as a product of differences without positive term, such as by Derridian deconstructivism, hegemony analysis or more classical structuralist approaches. Praxeological approaches, by contrast, point out the constitutive role of discursive praxis: from Foucault’s archaeology over Lacanian psychoanalysis to Butler’s theory of the performative.

As rough and incomplete as this tableau may be, it cannot do justice to the many zones of overlap existing between the three orientations as well as the ambivalence which usually characterizes theoretical work. Other intellectual impulses could be mentioned, such as Russian social semiotics as it is known from Mikhail Bakhtin for instance, whose notions of polyphony have played some role in applied linguistics, literary criticism and sociology (Angermu¨ ller 2011, 2012). Also, many discourse analysts, especially from linguistics, do not fit into such a theoretical grid as they define themselves more by their objects and methods. Therefore, if I have distinguished between three ideal-typical intellectual orientations, the hybridity of discourse analysis in Germany needs to be emphasized.

Towards discourse theory: from Critical Theory to poststructuralism

The belated success of discourse analysis in Germany does not signal that its problems and questions had no place before. On the contrary, questions of meaning are central to the German humanities and social sciences where the social production of meaning has always been a privileged object of study. A first tradition takes its root in philosophical idealism, i.e. philosophers like Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, who have influenced various humanist and hermeneutic strands of research. Another tradition comes from materialism, i.e. Marx/Engels’s critique of ideology leading to Critical Theory. The development of Critical Theory during the twentieth century was marked by an increasing role of questions of culture and language. From Horkheimer/Adorno’s culture industry (2002) up to Habermas’ discourse ethics (1985), all Critical Theorists have taken thinking and speaking as a socially situated activity. If earlier Marxist theorists subscribed to a critique of ideology in the context of class struggle, post-Marxists like Ju¨ rgen Habermas have argued for a linguistic turn in philosophy and social theory.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, representatives of the Frankfurt School of Critical

Theory were involved in two major controversies over the role of meaning, communication and discourse: (1) the ‘‘dispute over positivism’’ in which Theodor Adorno argued against positivist methodologies in the social sciences modeled after the natural sciences (Adorno 1976), (2) the confrontation between Ju¨ rgen Haber- mas’s normative discourse ethics (1985) and Niklas Luhmann’s constructivist systems theory (1996). In these confrontations, paradigmatic positions in discourse theory emerged which both point out the constitutive role of communication in politics and society (cf. Nonhoff 2004). While Habermas argues for a deliberative approach to discourse understood as the site where conflicting normative claims are negotiated in view of producing a consensus, Luhmann considers a social system as an autopoietic (self-creating) product of communicative operations following its own set of rules and creating its own realities.

If both take social order as communicative constructions, their theoretical

insights have rarely been translated into empirical research. Yet, since the 1980s, other strands of discourse research had formed dealing in one way or another with discourse. While Habermas’s normative conception of discourse was the most present in the intellectual realm, applied discourse research began under the heading of critical discourse analysis. In the 1980s and 1990s, discourse was understood in still another way by conversation analysts who have analyzed discourse as situated talk. Finally, discourse has always played an important role in many poststructuralist authors such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, who were received by historically oriented literary scholars (Bogdal 1999; Fohrmann and Mu¨ ller 1988; Klawitter 2000) before entering the social sciences through feminist deconstructivists and gender theorists (Feministische Studien 1993; Hark 1996).

As late as in the 1990s, ‘‘discourse’’, therefore, was still used in too many

unrelated ways to serve as an umbrella term for the research on the nexus of language and society. Yet the situation began to change when Foucault became a canonical reference of the interdisciplinary debate and other poststructuralist theorists of

discourse like Laclau/Mouffe and Slavoj Zˇ izˇ ek began to be received. Derrida’s

deconstructivist philosophy has been received as a tool for the critique of gender binarisms. Hegemony analysis has inspired the analysis of hegemonic strategies (Nonhoff 2006) and more classical structuralist approaches inspired by Bourdieu

and the French epistemological tradition have influenced Diaz-Bone’s interpretive analytics of lifestyle discourse (2002). Foucauldian governmentality studies have occupied a central place (Angermu¨ ller and van Dyk 2010; Bro¨ ckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2000) prolonging the considerations of historical power/knowledge (Bublitz et al. 1999; Feustel and Schochow 2010; Kerchner and Schneider 2006) and the

dispositif (Bu¨ hrmann and Schneider 2008). Despite Slavoi Zˇ izˇek’s ubiquitous presence and Judith Butler’s central intellectual influence, Lacanian psychoanalysis

has made little inroads. However, a ‘‘post-societal’’ line of social theory may be developing which points out the heterogeneity and contingent dynamics of the social in the line of Deleuze/Guattari (1987), Hardt/Negri (2000) and Latour (1987).

The intellectual success of Foucault and other poststructuralists in the social

sciences may have been in large part due to the innovative synthesis they offered with respect to the preceding antagonism between Critical Theory and systems theory. As a critic of power and a theorist of neoliberalism, Foucault prolongs questions dear to many critical theorists, whereas his antihumanist epistemology resonates with Luhmann’s radical constructivism. As a highly versatile author, Foucault is cited by discourse analysts from most different backgrounds, the two most important

‘‘Foucaults’’ today being probably the Foucault of the Archaeology of Knowledge (1972), pointing out the limits of structuralist theories of discourse, and the Foucault of power/knowledge in the governmentality lectures (2007), where he historically investigates the post-disciplinary shift to the (neo-)liberal dispositif.

If discourse analysis has always occupied an unstable place at the crossroads of

different traditions, this is especially the case for Michel Foucault. Thus, Archaeology reveals the intellectual hybridity of this pioneering work. By focusing on the historical contexts in which statements are enunciated, this work engages in an implicit dialog with pragmatics and hermeneutics. Against the background of enunciative-pragmatic insights, Foucault makes the case for meaning as the product of historically and socially situated practices. With the many readings that can be made of his work, Foucault like nobody else has served as a polyvalent reference in a field which draws from the many and different intellectual sources and traditions in Germany. It is the reception of Foucault which has allowed many different strands of research at the crossroads of language and society to come together under the comprehensive umbrella term of discourse analysis.

Linguistic strands of discourse analysis

If Critical Theory and poststructuralism refer to theoretical debates about communication and the linguistic turn in the social sciences, it needs to be remembered that it was linguists who first investigated discourse in the sense of text-based communication. More than their Anglo-American peers, German linguists are indebted to philological traditions informed by social, political and historical perspectives (Bo¨ ke, Jung and Niehr 2000). If text-linguistic developments, which dominated in German linguistics during the 1970s, extended the linguistic perspective beyond the level of words and sentences, they generally did not account for the specific uses of texts by actors in situations or sociohistorical contexts. The situation may be changing, however, as ‘‘discourse linguistics’’ testifies to a certain rapprochement between text linguistics, poststructuralism and perspectives on social actors (Adamzik 2002; Warnke 2007).

As a rule, the objects linguists typically deal with are not empirical in the sense of the social sciences. Social scientists want to reveal sociohistorical orders and rules relating actors who have certain resources allowing them to realize their ideas and goals (or not). Philological strands of linguistics, by contrast, usually want to account for ‘‘language’’ as a system of forms, classes and genres. Is it surprising, then, that linguists analyzing sociohistorical discourses empirically have caused some controversy in their discipline?

If the orientation of most linguistic discourse analysts is more social scientific than philological, the most well-known (and controversial) attempt at doing empirical discourse research at the crossroads of language and society has been made by the Duisburg Institute for Linguistic and Social Research (Duisburger Institut fu¨ r Sprach- und Sozialforschung, DISS) directed by Siegfried Ja¨ ger. In his Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis (2007), Ja¨ ger presents discourse analysis as a recipe-like methodology against the theoretical background of Foucault’s power theory and Leontjew’s action approach. Since the 1980s, DISS has produced numerous studies on mass-media representations of discriminated social groups. With this focus on the critique of political ideologies, German critical discourse analysts probably betray more of an activist orientation than their CDA colleagues in Austria and the Anglo-American world.

Following the literary scholar Ju¨ rgen Link, Ja¨ ger conceptualizes the discursive space as an interdiscourse (i.e. the public sphere as everyday discourse) in which specialized discourses (more exclusive institutional discourses such as law or art) are ordered vertically and horizontally. Thus, discourse is visualized as a tableau in which every discursive element occupies its functional position. The question is then to account for how a (perceived) discursive order helps legitimate an order of inequality. In this vein, Link has put forward the notion of ‘‘collective symbol’’ (1982) which is to explain how society’s different actors and groups are represented (e.g. the ‘‘full boat’’ where there is no place for immigrants). Link is especially interested in how historical regimes of ‘‘normalism’’ define standards of normalcy and deviancy (Link

1997).

Yet these power-theoretical linguists were not the only ones to claim the notion of discourse. At the same time, a more descriptive strand of linguistic discourse analysis began to develop at the crossroads of semantics and history. Thus, a tradition of historical linguistics developed beginning with Georg Sto¨ tzel’s investigations of controversial political concepts (1995). In this context, Martin Wengeler published an argumentative analysis of the German migration discourse (2003) and Dietrich Busse developed a theory of communicative action with respect to the evolution of historical semantic fields (1987). Together with the corpus linguist Wolfgang Teubert (1994), Busse introduced Foucault as a theorist of historical knowledge in linguistics. More recently, cognitive approaches such as frame theory and construction grammar have gained momentum in the linguistic debate (Ziem 2008).

Finally, ‘‘discourse’’ has been an important notion in certain pragmatic strands of linguistics, especially for ‘‘functional pragmatics’’, which looks into the pragmatic functions of human communication (Ehlich and Rehbein 1986). Up to the 1990s, ‘‘discourse’’ was sometimes used as synonymous with face-to-face interaction. Conversation analysts in Germany have been especially open to sociolinguistic and ethnographic perspectives on the wider cultural setting (Auer, Couper-Kuhlen and Mu¨ ller 1999; Deppermann 1999; Kallmeyer and Schu¨ tze 1976; Kotthoff 1998). Yet, conversation analysts demarcate themselves against abstract

philosophical considerations of language in use (Habermas 1985), against Fou- cauldian currents with their more macrosociological claims as well as against a

‘‘reductionist’’ tendency in Critical Discourse Analysis.

Discourse analysis in the social sciences

In the social sciences, discourse analysis began to develop only since the late 1990s as a reaction to the shift toward poststructuralism. Thus, since the year 2000, two major lines of discourse research have emerged, both crucially informed by Foucault’s pioneering work. The first strand, inspired by the sociology of knowledge of Berger/ Luckmann (1966), prolongs the hermeneutic traditions in the social sciences (cf. Hitzler, Reichertz and Schro¨ er 1999). While Knoblauch has pointed out the role of communicative genres in the social production of knowledge (1995), Reiner Keller, Werner Schneider, Willy Vieho¨ ver and Andreas Hirseland from Augsburg, for instance, analyze discourse in terms of intersubjectively shared knowledge (Keller et al. 2001). Sometimes with a background in interpretive social research (e.g. Oevermann’s et al. ‘‘Objective Hermeneutics’’ and his interpretive scheme approach

1979; Schwab-Trapp 1996), the representatives of post-Berger/Luckmannian dis- cursive sociology of knowledge typically cite Foucault in order to go beyond what is perceived as the microsociological limitation to the ephemeral, the local and the multiple (see Keller’s Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse 2005). The focus is on stocks of collective knowledge on a societal level putting the actor in the background. While turning away from the linguistic and practical dimensions of discourse, interpretive coding practices (e.g. Grounded Theory, Glaser and Strauss

1998) are mobilized against the background of Foucault’s post-humanist epistemol-

ogy. Along these lines, a number of empirical studies have been produced, e.g. on the discourse of professional competence (Truschkat 2008), doping in professional sport (Dresen 2010) and on the historical genesis of self-help books (Traue 2010).

The second strand is inspired by the debate on structuralism and poststructur- alism, which has challenged central theoretical notions in classical sociology like the autonomous actor and structural notions of the (container-)society. The focus is on the social as an open terrain in flux whose internal contradictions are sutured by practices of power/knowledge. From a poststructuralist view, discourse is seen as a loosely structured ensemble of disparate elements organized around fissures, clefts and holes, under- or non-defined places as it were, which recall the inbuilt tensions and dynamics of discourse. Discourses do not just reproduce structural laws, nor do they reflect what the actors mean to say (Angermu¨ ller, Bunzmann and Nonhoff

2001). Among the more macro-oriented poststructuralist strands, Laclau/Mouffe’s

(1985) hegemony theory has been mobilized to account for the post-war discourse of the social market economy (Nonhoff 2006), for the symbolic construction of ‘‘global enemies’’ in international relations (Herschinger 2011), for the mass-media success of nanotechnology (Wullweber 2010) as well as for the Basic Law as an empty signifier representing the political community (Brodocz 2002). Foucault’s power/knowledge approach has been cited in studies of neoliberal consensus production (van Dyk

2006), in the domain of development and post-national governance (Ziai 2007) and on techniques of self-rule in flexible capitalism (Spilker 2010). As poststructuralist strands typically share the critique of the speaking subject, they tend to be critical of methodologies relying on understanding as a subjective art of interpretation. While some Foucauldians have insisted on the disciplining and subjectifying effects of

method (Bro¨ ckling 2010; Schrage 2004), lexicometric methods have been utilized in order to investigate mass-media images of German cities in neoliberal govern- mentality (Mattissek 2008) or Francophony as a post-colonial discourse (Glasze

2011). Some have chosen methods in the line of structuralist semantics (Ho¨ hne 2003)

or narrative analysis (Vieho¨ ver 2001).

The more microsociologically minded approaches refer to pragmatic approaches such as French enunciative pragmatics and polyphony with respect to academic discourse (Angermu¨ ller 2007; Maeße 2010) as well as to ethnographical strategies informed by speech act theory concerning self-learning practices (Wrana 2006), power-theoretical ethnographies of professional counseling (Ott 2010) and perspec- tives on bodies in the classroom (Langer 2008). It should come as no surprise that the latter tend to be close to praxeological, interactionist and ethnomethodological types of discourse research (cf. ‘‘discourse analysis after structuralism’’ which crosses poststructuralist and praxeological approaches; Angermu¨ ller 2010, 2012). In this perspective, discursive order is seen as a practical achievement of readers engaging in rule-bound processes of fixing meaning. As opposed to semantic approaches to discourse mapping social spaces of meaning, the focus of process-oriented discourse analysts is on the sequential organization of the production of social order. Discourse is seen as a process in which actors, texts and objects are deployed according to certain rules. Thus, drawing from ethnomethodology and actor- network-theory, Scheffer shows how legal cases are constructed ‘‘step by step’’ in the highly institutional setting of a court (2010). In the line of ethnomethodological conversation analysis, Bergmann analysis the practice of gossiping (1993) and Meyer mobilizes linguistic anthropology in his study of the political organization of Native Americans (2005). Here, the question is how to account for the social production of meaning as the deployment of speech positions or as the negotiation of ‘‘correct’’ interpretations through actors’ accounts.

Lines of disciplinary divisions: constructivism versus realism, differentialism versus pragmatics

This mapping is by no means exhaustive (important post-Foucauldian developments in disciplines such as history should not be forgotten e.g. Landwehr 2001, Martschukat 2000; as well as German-speaking discourse scholars in Austria e.g. Wodak et al. 1999; and in Switzerland e.g. Sarasin 2001). Nor can it do justice to the multi-faceted debates on discourse with their complex lines of division. Among the divisions going along disciplinary lines, I want to mention two key problems of the interdisciplinary debate. Firstly, I want to point out the way social scientists usually perceive linguistics. Thus, the linguistic turn, hegemony analysis, poststruc- turalism and other radical constructionist tendencies (cf. Sta¨ heli 2000) has led social scientists to turn away from actor-centered approaches and to adopt the principle of difference as a methodological principle in social research. Therefore, when social scientists, e.g. those inspired by Laclau/Mouffe’s logic of difference and equivalence, encounter linguists, they are sometimes surprised to discover that nobody in linguistics today works with Saussure’s differentialist model anymore. What is more, they learn that most discursive strands in linguistics have been put forth precisely against Saussure’s notion of language as a code or grammar. Especially in the more sociologically oriented linguistics, discourse analysis has seen a broad shift

toward pragmatics, not least in France where enunciation theories took the place of

Saussurian structuralism in the late 1970s.

Conversely, the encounter with social scientists turns out not less surprising for some linguists, especially those with a background in critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis usually considers linguistic activity to be embedded in social structures of power and inequality. Therefore, CDA scholars adhere to realist models of society to the degree that CDA scholars see social problems as a given, as an objective power structure existing independently from what the actors do, say and think. However, German sociologists have never had a strong affinity for realism. Thus, realism was seriously questioned by actor-centered qualitative microsociolo- gies in the 1970s. Since the 1980s, the major intellectual projects in sociology from Habermas’s theory of communicative action over Niklas Luhmann’s (1996) system theory to Foucault’s power-knowledge-approach have all pleaded for constructionist approaches to social and symbolic order. Moreover, students of discourse in the social sciences usually have turned to discourse precisely because they are critical of realism.

Thus, the question may be not whether or not to accept constructionism but

rather whether to choose what kind of constructionism, i.e. more actor-centered or more anti-subjectivist ones. Therefore, at one end of the spectrum we can make out social constructionism inspired by phenomenology and historical hermeneutics which asks how a meaningful life-world is constructed by the actors. At the other end, there are ‘‘deconstructive’’ types of constructionism such as poststructuralism, systems theory, ethnomethodology and Actor-Network-Theory whose question is not how the actors construct their world but how the agents are constructed as autonomous, intentional and conscious actors. In this sense, two extreme poles of constructivist discourse analysts can be made out in the social sciences: (1)

‘‘reconstructive’’ discourse analysts who consider the social world as constructed by the actors, and (2) ‘‘deconstructive’’ discourse analysts who consider the actors as discursive effects. If most discursive social scientists situate themselves somewhere in between, few have shown enthusiasm for the realism displayed by some critical discourse analysts. From such an interpretive point of view, social problems are not a given. Society is constructed in discursive practices.

Conclusion: heterogeneous knowledge discourses

To conclude, let me summarize some of the preferred theories, objects and methodologies in German discourse analysis by discussing what it means to study heterogeneous knowledge discourses. Situated as it were between the two paradig- matic strands in discourse analysis, viz. the French structural tradition with its structural view from above and the Anglo-American pragmatic tradition of studying everyday life from below, German discourse analysis may be characterized by the special preference for what can be called heterogeneous knowledge. To analyze heterogeneous knowledge means dealing with impure, multi-layered and dynamic meaning on an open terrain of power/knowledge characterized by unstable inside/ outside boundaries. What does this focus mean for the way in which discourse analysis is done in Germany?

Firstly, concerning the general theoretical orientations, many discourse research- ers in Germany have been especially interested in the transversal organization of knowledge and meaning. With the French focusing on public discourses and the

Americans on everyday discourses, German discourse analysts are particularly interested in how knowledge is produced in multi-leveled institutional settings where different discourses meet. Some discourse analysts see discourse in terms of structured sets of sociosymbolic relations, others as rule-based processes of interpretation. Some privilege the view from above, others from below, while everybody’s question is how to mediate between both levels.

Secondly, concerning the themes and objects, many Germany discourse analysts have looked into meaning as a background of power/knowledge. While some investigate discourse in terms of semantic fields and shared knowledge, others attempt to account for the practical achievement of discursive order in sequential organizations. Content-analytical methodologies are generally criticized for leveling out the diversity of interpretations and abstracting from the readers’ practical competences. Just like French discourse analysts with their preference for the great moral-political questions of society, it is certainly not unusual for German discourse analysts to study political discourses (Macgilchrist 2011; Motakef 2010), which is testified by CDA work on racism, antisemitism and the Nazi heritage, the work of the Du¨ sseldorf school on migration and nationhood, or poststructuralist discourse analyses of neoliberalism and globalization. Special attention is given to educational, academic and intellectual discourses with their specialized knowledge, institutional positions and bureaucratic rules (Ja¨ ckle 2009; Kessl 2011; Langer and Wrana 2009).

Thirdly, concerning the methods of analysis, the wide use of interpretive

approaches is hardly surprising given the hermeneutic background of many qualitative researchers (Bu¨ hrmann et al. 2007). Especially, discourse analysts in the social sciences deal with the interpretive schemes by means of which written and oral ‘‘texts’’ are used in discourse. Or the material is coded according to ad hoc categories, sometimes with the help of computer programs (such as Atlas.ti or MaxQDA; Diaz-Bone and Schneider 2003). While interpretive research is char- acterized by a great deal of subjectivity, the strength of coding procedures is that it can account for heterogeneous, dynamic and open discourses which have recourse to naturally occurring data (such as documents, brochures and newspaper articles). New methods have been introduced to account for visual material (Meier 2008). Quantitative approaches are still rather new for social scientists, who usually prefer to have recourse to open text collections rather than to constituted corpuses. If linguists often rely on corpus-based designs to test hypotheses concerning the language under question, more recent approaches have adopted corpus-driven strategies where quantifying corpus analyses are carried out for explorative purposes (Bubenhofer 2009). Accordingly, discourse analysts usually follow an inversed research design by carrying out quantifying, lexicometric analyses (notably with Lexico 3 and WordSmith) before subjecting smaller passages to an in-depth analysis (Mattissek 2008). Thus, by going beyond traditional positivist logics of research, different methods are combined in order to account for an impure object in need of complementary methodologies.

If a general definition were to be given, discourse can be understood as a triangle of language, knowledge and practices. As opposed to traditional linguistics, discourse analysts do not limit themselves to the study of language and usually refuse to define discourse as a pure semiotic object (as ‘‘text only’’ as it were). Less than traditional social sciences, they have recourse to actors with intentions and interests. Meaning results from oral and written ‘‘texts’’ being used in contexts involving discourse participants with more or less developed knowledge.

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Note

1. If this article betrays a certain point of view, it is the point of view of a sociologist working at the crossroads of the social sciences and linguistics.

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