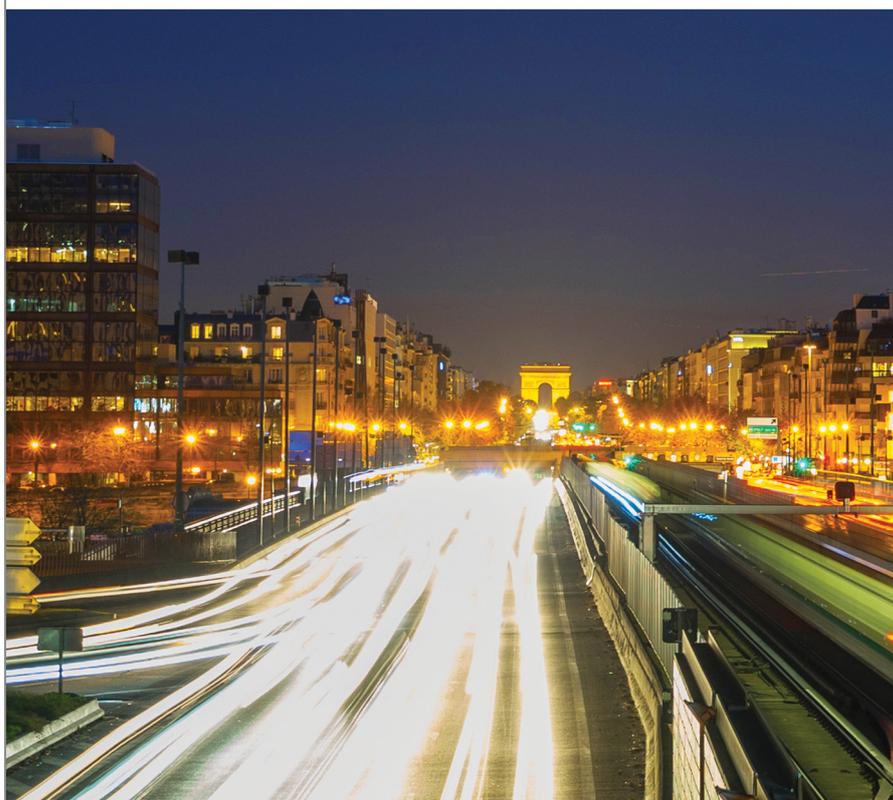


# Themes in discourse research: The case of Diana



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# Introduction

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This course introduces some of the main themes and issues in discourse analysis. To do this, it looks at extracts from the late Princess Diana interview screened on *Panorama* in 1995. The interview not only broke the conventions for British Royal appearances, but also reshaped the usual boundaries between public and private for the Royal family. While the focus here may be on Diana's words, the course is not in itself concerned with the Diana phenomenon. And while some of the points discourse analysis makes about the *Panorama* interview will explore her complex public representation, the course is concerned mainly with what the interview tells us about talk in general, about the construction of identity, about language and how it works, and about the sources of the order and patterning in social interaction.

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# Learning Outcomes

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After studying this course, you should be able to:

- identify some key themes in discourse analysis
- appreciate the consequences of discourse research for some key topics in social science, such as identity, interaction and subjectivity
- be familiar with some discourse analytical techniques and their consequences for analysing social interactions.

# 1 The case of Diana

## 1.1 Introduction

In this reading I focus on a piece of data to introduce some of the main themes and issues in discourse research. The material I have chosen to examine has historical interest. It is a public text of some import for British society and yet it also has a curiously private and confessional aspect. I am going to look at extracts from Princess Diana's interview with Martin Bashir which was screened in 1995 on *Panorama* – a British news-documentary television programme.

What was striking about the *Panorama* interview was that it broke the conventions for British Royal appearances. The interview was revelatory about Diana's private life. It reshaped the usual boundaries between public and private for the British Royal family and here was perhaps 'the most powerful image in world popular culture today' and 'a case study in the modern cult of celebrity' talking openly (Paglia, 1992: 23). Diana seemed to be giving the inside story. The programme was watched by many hundreds of millions across the globe and the intensity of this public fascination was confirmed by the extent of the mourning when she died in 1997.

Although I focus on Diana's words, I should stress that this reading is not about the Diana phenomenon. Some of the points discourse analysts would want to make about the *Panorama* interview cast light on her complex public representation. But I will be mainly interested in what the interview tells us about talk in general, about the construction of identity, about language and how it works, and about the sources of the order and patterning in social interaction.

## 1.2 Discourse as social action

Consider this first transcribed extract from the interview. Note that the numbers in brackets refer to pauses and give the length of the pause in seconds, while (.) signifies a micro-pause too small to count and .hhh indicates an audible in-breath.

### Extract 1

- BASHIR** at this early stage would you say that you were happily married
- DIANA** very much so (1) but (.) er the pressure on – on us both as a couple (.) with the media was phenomenal (1) and misunderstood by a great many people (1) we'd be going round Australia for instance .hhh (2) and (.) you – all you could hear was oh (.) she's on the other side (1) now if you're a man (1) like my husband a proud man (.) you mind about that if you hear it every day for four weeks (.) and you feel (.) low about it y-know instead of feeling happy and sharing it
- BASHIR** when you say she's on the other side what do you mean
- DIANA** well they weren't on the right side (.) to wave at me (.) or to touch me (1) ehm
- BASHIR** so they were expressing a preference even then for you rather than your husband

<b>DIANA</b>	yes (.) which I felt very uncomfortable with and I felt it was unfair (.) because I wanted to (.) share
<b>BASHIR</b>	but were you flattered by the media attention particularly
<b>DIANA</b>	no not particularly because with the media attention (.) came a lot of jealousy (1) a great deal (.) of (2) hhh complicated situations arose because of that

(Transcribed extract taken from Abell and Stokoe, 1999: 312)

This extract contains quite a complex account of events. Diana describes herself as a sharing kind of person. She describes Prince Charles as a proud man who felt low about the attention his wife was getting. She talks about her marriage. It was happy initially but disrupted by media pressure. Her account seems to do some business in presenting herself and Prince Charles. Her words are more than just an account, however, they can also be seen as a form of social action. This notion of **discourse as social action** is a central one and I want to look at three facets of this in some detail.

## 1.3 Discourse as social action *continued*

### 1.3.1 Discourse is constitutive

First we'll focus on Diana's utterances as a form of description. She is describing some events in the world and people's reactions to those. Social scientists deal with descriptions of this kind all the time. They are basic data. But what do we do with them? One way to respond is to move to judgements about adequacy and accuracy. Is this objective data? Is Diana telling it how it was? Would we want other sources of information about what really happened? Social science is made up of these kinds of decisions about the reliability of people's talk. Before we go down this path, however, it is worth pausing and considering what this emphasis on true or false (accurate or inaccurate) descriptions assumes about the world and about language. What is it saying about discourse and the way it works?

I think it assumes two things. First, it assumes that language works rather like a picture. It represents the world and people's thoughts and opinions. This representation can be faithful or, if people are malicious or lying, it can be unfaithful and misleading. Language's main function, however, is representational. The second related assumption is that the world, language and people are separate entities. Language in its picturing and representational modes mediates between the world and people. But language itself is removed from the world. It adds nothing but simply conveys from one person to another the nature of the world, people's impressions, their thoughts and opinions. Language in this sense is the neutral servant of the people.

Together these two assumptions suggest that language mostly works as a **transparent medium**. It assumes that language is a vehicle for getting to the real nature of events, people's real experiences, their views about what is going on as they report those to an audience. If this is the case then social scientists need not have much interest in language. Why should they? What is interesting is what is really going on and what people think about things and language is a means of studying those things.

The notion of discourse as social action questions all these assumptions. A central point discourse researchers make is that **language is constructive**. It is **constitutive** of social

life. Discourse builds objects, worlds, minds and social relations. It doesn't just reflect them. What does this mean exactly?

Words are about the world but they also form the world as they represent it. What is the case for humans, what reality is, what the world is, only emerges through human meaning-making. As Diana and others speak, on this and many other occasions, a formulation of the world comes into being. The world as described comes into existence at that moment. In an important sense, the social reality constructed in the *Panorama* interview and in other places of Diana's happy marriage buckling under media pressure did not exist before its emergence as discourse. Just as, for instance, we could say that whereas odd, discrepant or deviant behaviour might have always been found in human societies, it takes a certain kind of discourse and pattern of meaning-making to turn this into, for instance, 'schizophrenia' or 'witchcraft' or 'adolescent delinquency'. These are classifications which may be entirely unfamiliar in other societies. Once we have the notion 'schizophrenia' and it continues to be widely current (in a way witchcraft is no longer) then it is difficult to construct events alternatively. Indeed the very term 'deviant' relies on the forms of knowledge from social science.

As accounts and discourses become available and widely shared, they become social realities to be reckoned with; they become efficacious in future events. The account enters the discursive economy to be circulated, exchanged, stifled, marginalized or, perhaps, comes to dominate over other possible accounts and is thus marked as the 'definitive truth'. In discourse research, decisions about the truth and falsity of descriptions are typically suspended. Discourse analysts are much more interested in studying the process of construction itself, how 'truths' emerge, how social realities and identities are built and the consequences of these, than working out what 'really happened'. Part of what is meant, then, by the 'turn to discourse' is this epistemological stance which reflects the broader cultural and intellectual shifts of postmodernism.

The first facet, then, of the claim that discourse is social action is a rejection of the view that language is a 'do-nothing domain' (Edwards, 1997). It is worth pondering that notion of a 'do-nothing domain' a little longer. When language is seen as simply mediating between people and the world, then it tends to be seen as 'doing nothing'. If our notions of how language works are dominated by the metaphor of language as a picture then, again, language is seen as a passive rather than an active principle in social life. The alternative view is that texts (such as a transcribed interview) are not part of some natural process like a chemical reaction or electrons moving around a circuit. They are complex cultural and psychological products, constructed in ways which make things happen and which bring social worlds into being.

## 1.4 Discourse as social action *continued*

### 1.4.1 Discourse involves work

If discourse is doing something rather than doing nothing, what kinds of things are being done? We can see that Diana's account in Extract 1, like all accounts, constructs a **version** of social reality. When we talk we have open to us multiple possibilities for characterizing ourselves and events. Indeed, there are many ways Diana could have answered Bashir's first question in the extract above. Any one description competes with a range of alternatives and indeed some of these alternatives emerge in this particular interview. An interesting question for discourse analysts, therefore, is why *this* version or

*this* utterance? What does it do? What does it accomplish here and now? And what does it tell us about the wider discursive economy or the politics of representation which influence what is available to be said and what can be heard?

This property of language – that it allows for multiple versions – creates an **argumentative and rhetorical context** (Billig, 1991). The notion of rhetoric comes from ancient studies of political oratory but it has an important modern resonance. It suggests that discourse is often **functional** (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). It is designed to be persuasive, to win hearts and minds. The study of rhetoric is, in part, the study of the persuasive work and the organization of discourse to that end. This study demonstrates that what is said is often produced, heard and read in relation to the things which are not said. Discourse is a designed activity. It involves work.

Let us consider some of the discursive work involved in the extract above in more detail (see Abell and Stokoe, 1999; Bull, 1997; Kurzon, 1996). As Bull notes, very many of Diana's responses in the interview involve equivocation, criticism is predominantly done implicitly. Abell and Stokoe unpack this further. They note that the construction of Charles as proud and the unspecified reference to jealousy in Extract 1 are carefully managed. Criticism is often most effective rhetorically when it looks as though it is coming from an unbiased and neutral source who is merely describing what is the case, or from a source who is otherwise positive about the person criticized. Diana constructs herself as understanding of her husband: he possesses good qualities (he is proud) and is doing what any man might do. Yet, by contrast with 'sharing', these same qualities become questionable. Similarly, Diana's formulation in the last lines of the extract avoids explicitly claiming that Prince Charles was jealous, instead it is not specified who is jealous, yet the general context allows this to be heard as Prince Charles.

Discourse, then, involves labour; it is an active construction. This principle does not just apply to Diana carefully choosing her words in front of an audience of millions. Utterances in general are organized for a context, in response to or in dialogue with previous utterances, and oriented to other possible versions. Later we will need to consider just how intentional this process might be and the extent of the speaker's control.

## 1.5 Discourse as social action *continued*

### 1.5.1 The co-production of meaning

The third sense in which discourse is a social action refers to the origins of meanings. Meaning emerges from complex social and historical processes. It is conventional and normative. We have some idea what it signifies to say Prince Charles is a proud man because we are members of a speaking community and culture which has agreed associations for 'proud man'. We draw on those to make sense. Meaning is also **relational**. Proud signifies as it does because of the existence of other terms, the contrast with meek, arrogant, humble and so on. Discourse continually adds to, instantiates, extends and transforms the cultural storehouse of meanings.

Meaning is social not just in the very grand global sense of storehouses and dictionaries but also in a very local sense. Utterances are **indexical**. Their sense depends on their contexts of use. Thus Diana describes Charles as a proud man in what for us as readers is the immediate context of the rest of Extract 1. And, at the end of the extract we have a quite specific evaluation and frame of reference for 'proud man' coloured by what precedes and what follows.

There is a further sense in which **meaning is a joint production**. It is a production of culture but also of the participants engaged in any particular interaction. With conversation this point is obvious but it is the case also for writing. Writing is addressed to someone and writing and reading (interpretation) together make a text for that moment, always open, of course, to other readings so a piece of writing can become other potential texts. In the production of discourse we see people cooperating to generate social events which make shared sense (Garfinkel, 1967). Social life depends on this very possibility of coordinated action. Consider, for example, Martin Bashir's role in Extract 1. Together, these two (interviewer and interviewee), and the hidden institution of television, create a context where this talk is appropriate and works as communication.

## 1.6 Discursive practices

Some of the thinking behind the claim that discourse is social action has now been unpacked. But what explains the order and pattern in this social action? One source of regularity is the **discursive practices** which people collectively draw on to organize their conduct. Take a look back again at Extract 1. Even this short piece of discourse reveals many complex layers of these practices. It reveals that there is such a thing as an **interaction order** to use a concept developed by Goffman (1983). In other words, there are regular ways of doing things in talk – practices – which guide people and order discourse.

One obvious feature of the extract, for example, is that it fits within a familiar **discursive genre** of the news or documentary interview – other genres might be gossip or conversation with a young child, or a lecture, or giving testimony in a court of law. Sociolinguists who study interaction argue people draw on a range of **contextualization cues** in deciding what kind of language event something is and how they should behave (Gumperz, 1982). According to Gumperz, contextualization cues guide people's expectations about how conversational and other exchanges should develop, appropriate modes of speaking, the interpersonal relations involved, and the speaking rights of those involved.

Interviewers in news interviews have a particular set of devices they employ which constitute this type of speech event or discursive genre and which relate to their task in this speech event of being neutral and professional and posing questions not on their own behalf but for 'the people' as an over-hearing audience (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991). Thus Bashir, for instance, does not evaluate or respond to Diana's comments as a friend might; he does not talk about his own relationships or problems. He controls the flow of topics and the talk proceeds turn-by-turn within the normative frame of the interview with Diana, too, responding in part.

## 1.7 Discursive practices *continued*

### 1.7.1 Footing

The practices which make up a speech event or the interaction order can be quite fine grained. In documentary programmes such as *Panorama*, for instance, interviewers have to be particularly sensitive to the accusation that they are biased, that they are not sufficiently detached or impartial. As Clayman (1992) demonstrates, one way interviewers

achieve this while still asking pertinent and provocative questions is through adjusting their **footing**. The term ‘footing’ again comes from Goffman, and is the notion that when people talk they can speak as either the **author** of what they say, as the **principal** (the one the words are about) or as the **animator** of someone else’s words. As you will see in the extracts here, often those three positions coincide, as in this line where Diana responds to a comment about the media’s preference for her:

### Extract 2

**DIANA** which I felt very uncomfortable with and I felt it was unfair (.) because I wanted to (.) share.

Here she is the animator (she is the one speaking) and she is the author because these are her beliefs and sentiments being expressed and she is the principal since the authored words are about herself as the subject described. Compare that with some of the ways in which Bashir set up his questions in other parts of the interview.

### Extract 3

**BASHIR** It has been suggested in some newspapers that you were left largely to cope with your new status on your own. Do you feel that was your experience?

### Extract 4

**BASHIR** According to press reports, it was suggested that it was around this time things became so difficult that you actually tried to injure yourself.

The footings in these cases are more complicated. Bashir is the animator but could he be described as the author or the principal? And, what is accomplished by splitting the footing in these cases so that authorship becomes attributed elsewhere to ‘newspapers’ and ‘press reports’? Clayman’s work on other news interviews suggests that what Bashir accomplishes, and what is standardly accomplished with this kind of format, is attributional distance. In other words, Bashir gets to make a potentially sensitive, controversial or critical point but in a way which does not compromise his status as a non-evaluative and neutral interviewer.

You might want to consider this in more detail. The genre of the news or documentary interview also often includes the notion of the interviewer as ‘interrogator’, getting to the truth for the people, against a potentially hostile or devious witness. Bashir, however, is not using the possibilities of footing to put critical or difficult questions. Look again at how he frames the questions in Extracts 3 and 4 and consider the kinds of identities he offers Diana. I would argue that these are sympathetic or understandable identities: she only injured herself because things became so difficult, she was left to cope on her own. You could argue that the discursive evidence suggests that other genres apart from the news interview are becoming implicated here – perhaps the genre of confessional ‘therapeutic’ shows such as Oprah Winfrey.

## 1.8 Discursive practices *continued*

### 1.8.1 Discursive practices are flexible

In general terms, then, the interaction order is not a set of hard and fast rules which people follow like social dopes. Rather, discursive practices are flexible and creative resources. Genres may be mixed together and new genres can emerge. Part of the task of ethnographers of communication is to try to describe the diversity across social situations. In effect, they are charting what they call **communicative ecologies** (Gumperz, 1999): the variable and dynamic discursive practices found in a community or which distinguish particular speech events. As Gumperz argues, it is these ecologies and the cultural knowledges that go with them which make it possible, for instance, to hear just a few words on the radio, out of context, and be able to immediately identify the words as coming from a comedy show, constituting 'the news', as a politician's answer to a question or as a 'vox pop', the voice of 'the person in the street', and so on.

The range of phenomena which make up discursive practices within wider speech events is large and varied. It includes, for instance, **turn taking** – how do two or more speakers manage to divide the conversational floor between them? Turn taking has been studied by conversation analysts who are also interested in the regular ways in which people perform different kinds of discursive activities such as turning down invitations, making requests, repairing mistakes, and so on. These are the craft skills of interaction, routinely performed and highly pervasive. In the discipline of ethnomethodology these are understood as **people's methods** for *doing* everyday life.

It is worth considering for a minute what kind of knowledge or method this is that people possess. Is this knowledge that people can clearly articulate? How intentional is it? Is it automatic and unconscious knowledge? Is it like following a recipe? Is it a skill like riding a bike? No one easy answer can be given. Consider, for instance, some of the other phenomena which sociolinguists study. Some sociolinguists have argued that there is such a thing as a **genderlect**. In other words there are distinctive ways of speaking and forms of interacting which are gender linked. There is such a thing as 'speaking like a man'. The existence of and explanation for such genderlects are hotly debated. But if it was established that women used more modal adverbs (e.g. so, very, much) than men, for instance, would this be best described as a strategic performance? Sociolinguists are also interested in phenomena such as accent shifts in the course of a conversation, intonation patterns, tonal qualities and the social messages these convey to different audiences. Diana, for instance, conveys a great deal of information to her audience concerning the social groups she belongs to through these features of her voice and delivery, and yet accent is not something which is usually self-consciously performed.

Some of the things people do in talk – their discursive practices – are remarkably subtle. Take a look at another extract from the *Panorama* interview.

#### Extract 5

- |               |                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>BASHIR</b> | Did you (.) allow your friends, your close friends, to speak to Andrew Morton?                                                                                         |
| <b>DIANA</b>  | Yes I did. Yes I did                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>BASHIR</b> | Why                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>DIANA</b>  | I was (.) at the end of my tether (.) I was (.) desperate (.) I think I was fed up with being (.) seen as someone who was a basket case (.) because I am a very strong |

person (.) and I know that (.) causes complications, (.) in the system (.) that I live in. (1.0) ((smiles and purses lips))

**BASHIR** How would a book change that.

**DIANA** I dunno. ((raises eyebrows, looks away)) Maybe people have a better understanding (.) maybe there's a lot of women out there who suffer (.) on the same level but in a different environment (.) who are unable to (.) stand up for themselves (.) because (.) their self-esteem is (.) cut into two. I dunno ((shakes head))

(Extract adapted from Potter, 1997: 151)

## 1.9 Discursive practices *continued*

### 1.9.1 'I dunno'

In his analysis of Extract 5, Potter focuses on the phrase 'I dunno', which appears at the beginning and at the end of Diana's last turn above. This phrase seems throwaway, just one fragment, yet perhaps it illustrates something about people's methods or discursive practices more widely. Why is that phrase there? What work does it do? Given the point made in the previous section that events can always be described differently, why this description of this kind of mental state at this point in the conversation?

Potter proceeds by looking through various corpora of discursive data for other examples of the use of 'I don't know' and he argues on the basis of this that 'I don't know' appearing at particular points in conversations can be a method for doing what he calls **stake inoculation**. Potter suggests that questions of stake are key concerns of participants in an interaction. People treat each other as having vested interests, desires, motives and allegiances (as having a stake in some position or other) and this is a problem if one wants one's version of events to be heard as authoritative and persuasive, factual, not interested or biased but the simple, plain, unvarnished truth. I noted earlier how Diana manages to do indirect criticisms attentive to the ways in which such criticism might be heard. People have developed ways, then, of managing stake, inoculating against the appearance of having some interest.

Potter suggests that Diana's use of 'I dunno' works in this way. He argues that the topic of the conversation in the extract above – Diana's participation in Morton's book – is a controversial issue for her where her motives (was she just trying to get back at Charles?) have been frequently discussed in the media. Further

the placement of the 'I dunno's' in the Princess's talk is precisely where the issue of motive is most acute. For the Princess to accept that the book was part of a planned and strategic campaign to present a particular view of the royal marriage and her role in it would be potentially culpable. The 'I dunno's' present her as not sure of the role of the book, perhaps thinking it fully over for the first time . . . the vagueness here is rather neatly in tune with both the 'on the hoof' quality presented by the 'I dunno's'; and the non-verbal finessing of the phrase with a look into the distance as though searching for the answer (in the first instance), and then shaking her head as though it is a difficult question which she did not have a ready or clear answer for (in the second instance).

(Potter, 1997: 157)

## 1.9.2 To sum up

Such an analysis reinforces the notion of discourse as a form of work or labour. It also implies a strategic speaker. But, again, is this the case? Are speakers strategic in this way or just doing what comes naturally? It can suggest, too, a duplicity in Diana's actions. Potter is not implying this, however. Rather, as knowledgeable speakers and competent members of discursive communities, we are all, like Diana, skilled in a range of methods for accomplishing different activities such as stake inoculation.

To sum up, I have argued that discourse is constructive and a form of social action, further this is a form of action with regularity and pattern to it. One of the interests of social scientists engaged in discourse research is to clarify the orderly practices involved and the implications of these for the conduct of social life. Such research raises a number of issues and debates about the nature of these practices, how best to study them and the implications for the way we understand social life and the human actor.

## 1.10 Voice and the speaking subject

Discursive practices, as we have seen, order the shape of written and spoken discourse; they order the features which appear and the selection of words and phrases. But these properties are only a small subset of those which govern meaning-making. In this and in the next section we will be more concerned with patterns in the *content* of discourse and the psychological and sociological implications of those patterns. This will help elaborate further on the notion that language is constructive – that it builds social worlds.

I want to look first at some of the patterns in Diana's own representation of herself in the *Panorama* interview and then move on in the next section to consider Diana as a popular icon – Diana as the subject of discourse – and the many millions of words which have been written about her.

In an analysis of the *Panorama* interview, Lisa Blackman (1999) argues that, in telling her story, Diana draws on a type of therapeutic discourse of strong women suffering and coping which has become characteristic in recent years in women's magazines. By discourse, Blackman means here an organized system of statements. The suggestion is that as members of a culture we are rarely original. Rather, to communicate at all, we have to draw on accepted and conventional images, ideas and modes of talking about ourselves and others. These modes, of course, are constantly changing so that any study of the content of women's magazines in the 1950s is likely to find very different discourses and modes of representation compared to the 1990s.

One of the startling aspects of the *Panorama* interview was its confessional quality. Diana discussed, for example, her bulimia, her own and her husband's adultery and her attempts at self-injury. But how did she represent these things? What broader **narratives** did she draw upon to contextualize these? Discourse researchers often focus on the kinds of stories people tell. They look at the way these stories are formed, the genres of storytelling they draw upon (such as romance or the heroic epic) and the ways in which stories construct identities and events (Bruner, 1990; Mishler, 1995; Riessman, 1993.)

Blackman argues that the narratives Diana chose exemplify a sea change in our culture's representations of what might previously have been called 'madness'. Aspects of self which might once have been described as symptomatic of insanity are presented instead

as the opportunity for work on one's self and a stimulus for self-development. The focus is on coping and self-empowerment. Bulimia is thus a failed coping strategy to be replaced by more constructive coping styles. This is not a story, then, of tragedy but a narrative of winning out over adversity.

### Extract 6

**BASHIR** And so you subjected yourself to this phase of bingeing and vomiting?

**DIANA** You could say the word 'subjected' but it was my escape mechanism and it worked for me at the time.

(adapted from transcript in Blackman, 1999: 114)

Blackman argues that the ideal in Diana's talk and in modern women's magazines is of 'the autonomous woman who does not lean on or need others and who above all can "believe in herself"' (1999: 115). The goal is presented as gaining enough self-confidence to become so empowered. Diana presents herself as a victim who nonetheless emerges as a strong woman who has sorted herself out.

## 1.11 Voice and the speaking subject *continued*

### 1.11.1 Subject positions

In her analysis, Blackman is identifying a pattern in Diana's talk and relating it to other similar methods of self-representation found in our culture. It is worth thinking through this in more detail. One key claim of discourse researchers is that language positions people – discourse creates **subject positions**. What does this mean? To speak at all is to speak from a position (remember the discussion of footing in the previous section). Further than this, the positions or slots in culturally recognized patterns of talk such as the 'autonomous woman', the 'mad woman', 'the fragile victim' and so on, construct us as characters and give us a psychology. In other words, they provide us with a way of making sense of ourselves, our motives, experiences and reactions.

This raises a profound question. Who speaks when we speak? We could argue that our culture speaks through Diana, that she is animating or giving voice to collective and cultural identities. As a result, it becomes difficult when any person speaks to say what is personal and what is collective and cultural. In talking or writing we take on the discourses of our culture – we rehearse, elaborate and instantiate cultural modes of representation as we communicate. In describing Diana's self-representation in this way I am not trying to undermine its power or the efficacy of this way of talking. The fact that there may be alternative discourses, or that these are cultural first and personal second, does not mean that any particular account might not be a 'useful truth' for the women who use it.

### 1.11.2 Talk is dialogical

Discourse researchers have also argued that all talk is **dialogical**, meaning that when we speak we combine together many different pieces of other conversations and texts and, significantly, other voices. We are often quoting. Sometimes this quoting is marked as when we say 'he said . . . then she said ...' but often it is indirect and unmarked as people

take over the voices of others. We carry into our talk and writing fragments from many different sources which carry some of their old connotations with them and acquire new ones as they are used in new contexts. Research on the discourse of children, for example, demonstrates how the process of education and socialization is partly a process of learning to manage the voices of others such as teachers and turn these into an internal mental dialogue carried over, too, into external conversation. Even at higher levels, the process of learning to be a discourse analyst, for instance, is in a real sense a matter of learning to *talk as* a discourse analyst.

Discursive psychologists and conversation analysts who have worked through the implications of these and other ideas for psychological theories (Sacks, 1992) have argued that the study of discourse has radical implications for the study of psychological states such as memory and emotion. Diana, as we have seen, often talked in the interview about her emotional states. Are these utterances best seen as simple reports of what she felt? The notion that discourse is an activity – a form of work – undermines this simple notion. To report on an emotion or a feeling is also very commonly a rhetorical activity and the display of emotion does some interactional business. Think back, for instance, to what is accomplished by Diana's self-characterization in Extract 1: 'I wanted to share'.

One response to this might be to see these kinds of examples as anomalous and think of how to arrange communication situations without any 'rhetorical noise', where there is nothing at stake for the participants so that internal mental states can be faithfully pictured, represented and described. Therapy, for example, could be seen as an attempt to construct a situation of this type. Perhaps this is a situation where people can talk honestly and openly about their experiences without trying to do any extra discursive work than simply represent in the clearest words possible what they feel. Yet, does therapy escape discursive history? Are we not back to the points Blackman makes, for instance, about the representation of mental states at different periods in history? Most of us have been exposed to popular psychology in one form or other – we have those discursive framings *available* and yet forty years ago they were not widely *available*. We might ask, too, about the kind of speech event which therapy constitutes and the contextualization cues which might be relevant.

Similarly, memory might be thought to be a better example of a 'pure' psychological state than emotion. Surely we know what we remember uninfluenced by any discursive framing? Yet is it possible to have memories independently of collective social constructions of events? Consider, for example, the kind of memories people might have of the death of Diana and the ways in which these evoke the narratives of her life and death through which the public response was mediated. It makes sense in these cases to talk of 'collective memory'. Even a collection of people's dreams of Diana (Frances, 1998) demonstrates these marks of her cultural and collective significance. We only know what kind of thing an event is – even the most private and idiosyncratic events – through cultural and conventional codes.

## 1.12 The politics of representation

We turn now to consider Diana as an icon, as the subject of discourse. It could be said that Diana and the many words written about her form a **discursive space** (Gilbert *et al.*, 1999; Silverstone, 1998). She is the rather enigmatic centre of many competing representations of royalty, femininity, democracy, the family, morality, celebrity, fashion, private versus public life which jostle with each other. Such a discursive space is a place

of argument. To use another metaphor, it is an argumentative texture or a discursive fabric that brings together many different threads which can be combined and woven differently (Laclau, 1993).

### 1.12.1 Contestation and power

The metaphors of 'discursive space' and 'argumentative texture' bring a number of points to our attention. First, we can note the emphasis on **contestation**. There is usually in social life a struggle over how things are to be understood and for that reason it makes sense to talk of a **politics of representation**. Second, power is at issue here. Social scientists who study discourse have been interested in how people, groups and institutions mobilize meanings. How have some interpretations become dominant and whose interests do they serve? It has been recognized that control over discourse is a vital source of power and also there are limits to this control because meanings are fluid and escape their users and can be mobilized and re-worked to resist domination.

The relationship between discourse and power is a complex one. If we are arguing that discourse is constitutive and new identities emerge for people, for instance, as new modes of representation emerge, then it is difficult to say if discourse is the governor or the servant of social actors. Is Diana, presented as a strong autonomous woman through a discourse of self-help and coping, the powerful subject mobilizing these meanings for her own ends or is she being subjected to this discourse? Is she being 'disciplined' by it and having her self powerfully constructed for her as she takes on this mode of representation? Who is in control?

### 1.12.2 Constructing discursive spaces

Finally, the notion of discursive space draws attention to the broader social practices which construct such spaces. Thus social scientists and discourse researchers have been interested in the practices of production of newspapers and the media and in the ways in which economic and technological developments construct discursive spaces. E-mail, the internet and computer-mediated communication are good examples of how changing practices produce new spaces which construct new kinds of discursive communities. In relation to Diana, I noted earlier Camille Paglia's assessment made in 1992 that Diana may be the most powerful image in world popular culture today. Such celebrity is similarly a new kind of discursive space made possible by innovative globalized technologies of meaning-making.

To make some of these points about the politics of representation a little more concrete, I would like to briefly consider one facet of the contestation over the discursive space which is Diana. Look at the two statements which follow. The first comes from the journalist Peter Hitchens writing in the UK newspaper the *Daily Express* in response to the *Panorama* interview.

Monarchy's rules were not decreed by chance, any more than our great cathedrals or castles were thrown up by planless amateurs. The wise men who drew up those rules knew from hard and bloody experience that remoteness, majesty and an iron law of succession were necessary for authority and stability. Like so many children of this silly century, Diana believes she knows better, and has acted accordingly.

(cited in Craig, 1997: 15)

The second statement is only three words long. It is the British Prime Minister Tony Blair's description of Diana after her death as 'the people's princess'.

Hitchens' view is a conservative one. He is highly critical of Diana's confessional style in her interview counterposing it against the majesty and authority of monarchy derived from centuries of stiff-lipped reticent tradition. One of the interesting features of his discourse is his construction of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983). He talks, for example, of 'our great cathedrals'. Who is the 'we' that he is constructing here and what properties and qualities might be associated with this community? Who might be excluded from this 'we'? Blair, of course, is constructing a very different imagined community – the people who mourn Diana's death – but his phrase also evokes chains of association. 'The people' has socialist significations; it is a phrase with a particular discursive history. It implies demotic and ordinary, and claims Diana for an alternative constructed constituency. Indeed part of the argumentative texture which surrounds Diana since her death includes her effect and the effect of the remarkable public mourning for her death on British politics *per se*. Is this a sea change in British concepts of 'the nation' and British identity? Does this represent the 'feminization' of politics? Has Blair claimed Diana for his own New Labour political project or does she have more radical feminist and socialist implications? (see Kirby, 1998; Wilson, 1997 and Special Issues of *New Formations*, 1999 and *Screen*, 1998).

To sum up. In this and the previous section I have tried to expand our notion of discursive practices and meaning-making to include the content of discourse, the representational work it does, and the **interpretative resources** which belong to cultures and societies. These, like the practices noted in the previous section, are also a source of order in discourse. In addition, they raise profound debates about power, agency, the nature of subjectivity and contestation.

## 1.13 Conclusion

So far we have traversed three kinds of domain in which the study of discourse is relevant. Discourse is often (but not necessarily) interactional and researchers have studied the order and pattern in social interaction. The study of discourse also has important psychological implications for the study of minds, selves and sense-making. Finally, discourse is about social relations, culture, government and politics.

No doubt, as you have been reading some problematic and confusing areas of debate have emerged. Here I want to note two related points of debate for further consideration. First, what are the boundaries of discourse? We could take as a simple definition that discourse is talk, language in use and human meaning-making activities. This definition suggests a couple of contrasting possibilities. The term 'talk' proposes quite tight boundaries; language in use is broader – it includes texts such as novels and newspapers – while 'human meaning-making activities' is very broad. Meaning-making activities might include, for instance, the visual such as films and works of art. It might include objects, such as gas cookers, for instance, since such objects represent a long history of meaningful work and the significations we have inherited in our cultural practices of eating and cooking (Chouliaraki, 2001).

With Diana, much of our information is visual. We have very few of her words. As Geraghty argues, 'for much of her married life, Diana was literally speechless; it was clearly her person, her body, which was the news. Her *being there* was what was important' (1998: 71, emphasis in the original). Are bodies part of discourse, however? What are the boundaries? What is discursive and what is extra-discursive? Is anything

extra-discursive? The circumstances of Diana's death were intensely physical: the car crash and the mangled pile of steel in the tunnel. That, surely, is real, beyond talk. Yet what knowledge do we have of these things beyond human meaning-making?

Such queries raise immensely difficult epistemological issues and raise problems, too, for what we might be trying to do as analysts studying a piece of discourse. What is the status of our own interpretations of a piece of talk, for instance; are these outside discourse? Such debates reverberate through the discourse research community. What is clear, however, is the pervasiveness of discourse. Increasingly, everywhere, talk, self and other representation are becoming more and more central to how we define what work is, for example. In studying discourse, then, we cannot help but study social life.

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