

WORKSHOP: Engaging with discourse data in professional and institutional settings

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Discourse analysis – concerned with talk, text and other modalities – has been carried out over the past four decades, across disciplinary boundaries, embedded in quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. Within the qualitative paradigm, researchers adopt different methodological and analytical perspectives when engaging with discourse data. Beginning with what we understand by ‘discourse’ as it has implications for what we choose as data as well as our analytical toolbox, I address the issue of the positioning of discourse analysts in an insider-outsider continuum. This leads me to propose three kinds of paradoxes which are characteristic of discourse analysis in professional and institutional settings – observer’s paradox, participant’s paradox and analyst’s paradox. I then reflect on ways of minimising such paradoxes through alignment (in terms of context and content) and triangulation (of data sources, analyst-participant perspectives, mixed methods etc.) in order to achieve a balance between under- and over-interpretation of discourse data (Sarangi 2007). In arguing that a fuller contextualisation of the institutional and professional orders is central to our analytical enterprise, I introduce a set of key tools that are applicable across talk and text data in professional and institutional settings. Within what can be broadly captured as theme-oriented discourse analysis (Roberts and Sarangi 2005), I then illustrate the framework of ‘activity analysis’ (Sarangi 2000, 2010a, 2010b) which is distinctive in at least three ways: mapping of structural, interactional and thematic trajectories; relationality concerning focal themes and analytic themes; and role performance vis-à-vis participant structure. I also outline the framework of ‘accounts analysis’ which orients to the rhetorical properties of discourse data.

Selected References

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