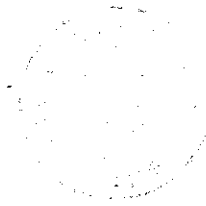


Positioning Gender in Discourse

A Feminist Methodology

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knowledge of themselves and their position in the world, it is presumed that their power to transform social relations should increase accordingly.

The feminist quest to make the personal political is premised on the modernist assumption that each individual woman or man possesses a unique essence of human nature (Weedon, 1997). Classical liberal humanism suggests that this essence is constituted by rational consciousness, which allows us to gain access to the truth about the material world. Thus, in feminist forms of humanism, the central concern is with human nature, the forms of identity it prescribes – both biologically and through socialisation – and, in particular, the essential differences between women and men. It is an important aspect of this view that it is predicated upon humanist assumptions of identity because, if women are unitary subjects possessing a core, female nature, this will transcend differentiating social categories whether of age, class, colour, language, culture or creed. The notion of a 'female' human nature offers a collective bond between all women regardless of history, geography or culture.

According to this perspective, the quest to articulate, reclaim and celebrate the myriad forms of female experience is simultaneously a personal act of self-expression and a political protest against the historical silencing and marginalisation of women. This quest to make the personal political has been conducted through the medium of academic debate, consciousness-raising and collective action, and has various purposes. First, it aims to make visible areas of a woman's world traditionally peripheralised as too trivial, irrelevant, sensitive, threatening or sexually taboo by the world of men. This includes issues of the 'body' such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, mothering, the menopause, rape and domestic violence. Secondly, the modernist quest has sought to liberate individual women from psychological oppression by inviting them to engage in personalised political acts such as consciousness-raising and more recently, psycho-analytic counselling and therapy. Mitchell (1974: 61) has described consciousness-raising, for example, as 'the process of transforming the hidden, individual fears of women into a shared awareness of the meaning of them as social problems'. Thirdly, the value of collective, direct action for feminists (such as the campaign against nuclear weapons at Greenham Common in Britain in the 1980s) is that it can work on both personal and political levels. Women's participation in

various forms of political protest is thus viewed as part of a journey towards self-discovery and self-knowledge.

Finally, the aim to make the personal political has been incorporated into some areas of feminist theory. The guiding belief in the centrality of female experiences has led to a feminist hostility, in some quarters, to *theory* as it is conventionally constituted by male academic discourse. Until relatively recently in the history of scholarship, women have been conspicuously absent from the active production of theory. Feminist scholars have criticised rationalist, positivist and empiricist models of theory and research, which they regard as scientific, exclusionary and sexist. While feminist theorists' resistance to conventional academic discourse has taken a variety of forms, notable among these has been the trend towards making women the *subject* rather than the object of study. This endeavour to transform constructions of and access to knowledge has led feminist theorists to privilege *personalised*, confessional, autobiographical or narrative writing (either their own or that of their research subjects), purportedly unmediated by excess theory and regarded as a conduit to the 'true' expression of female experience. Examples of such alternative feminist approaches to theory construction are plentiful, but two, drawn from an educational context, will suffice here. Miller (1996) has contested the genre of evidence-based rational argument in her book *School for Women* which weaves together anecdotes, autobiography, narrative and writings from teachers, in her overview of the history of women teachers. Similarly, Middleton (1993) uses a life-history approach to analyse women's place within post-war schooling. She effectively blends the personal with the political in her autobiographical approach to the discussion of policy and pedagogy.

A common voice

Modernist feminism has sought to unify women against patriarchal oppression by expressing its arguments and demands for change with a common voice. The rationale for this is that accounts of female subjugation or challenges against patriarchy need to have an unambiguous, univocal coherence so that they simultaneously work internally to address both feminists and the broader category of women, as well as externally to confront male-dominated power structures. In terms of political impact, a unified feminist message is

considered to have a greater likelihood of penetrating the monolith of male power than the babble of competing viewpoints. Moreover, armed with the knowledge that women as a social group have been silenced or written out of the histories of culture, language and literature that men have documented, modernist feminists have sought to reinstate the construct of the essential female voice. For example, language and gender theorists, following Lakoff (1975), initiated investigations into the possibility of identifying a common female use of language, which involved the reclamation of styles of speech often associated with females but andro-centrally deemed low status, such as gossip (Jones, 1980), politeness (Holmes, 1995) and co-operative speech (Coates, 1995, 1998).

But in order for the feminist movement to guarantee support for the notion of a common voice representing women's shared interests, it has traditionally had to predicate its assumptions upon the notion of biological sex as a foundational category. Modernist feminists have agonised over the epistemological significance of recognising a female 'pre-discursive reality' – a place where women's experiences can be said to exist prior to their formulation in language or discourse. This notion is important for such theorists to establish, because without it, the foundational category of the female-sexed human nature cannot be presumed to exist outside its discursive construction. As Weedon (1997) points out, the desire to give expression to women's 'essential' subjectivity is a key motivation behind the feminist emphasis on the importance of speaking out for women. In its most radical form, she suggests, this position indicates that what we say as biological females about our experience is what it is to be a woman. In other words, sex determines gender, biology is regarded as the key determining influence on women's language, and women's language can therefore be identified as a separate communicative subculture. This both strengthens and limits its symbolic value as a common voice. A common female language becomes a strength if it simultaneously reinforces the sense of shared experience and oppression between women from apparently differing backgrounds (in terms of class, race, culture and so on). But, an exclusively female voice may become a limitation if it suppresses vital differences *between* women, thus precluding a belief in the plurality of human identity. As Butler (1990: 325) has said, when the female sex category is understood as representing a set of values and

dispositions, it becomes normative in character and thus exclusionary in principle:

This move has created a problem both theoretical and political, namely that a variety of women from various cultural positions have refused to recognise themselves as 'women' in the terms articulated by feminist theory with the result that these women fall outside the category and are left to conclude that (1) either they are not women as they have previously assumed or (2) that the category reflects the restricted locations of theoreticians and hence fails to recognise the intersection of gender with race, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality and other currents which contribute to the formation of cultural (non) identity.

As a further consequence, the principle of a common female voice potentially distances and alienates the 'Other', that is, those individuals (not always men) and those power structures and processes at which political addresses and actions may be directed. While this may represent a more than legitimate goal for radical feminists and separatists, it may undermine the policies and practices of more moderate feminists for whom engagement and dialogue form a necessary part of the process of resistance and transformation.

These three principles which have featured within modernist feminism – a universal cause, a belief that the personal is political, and its endeavour to achieve a common voice – are at variance with the multi-faceted viewpoints of post-structuralism, as I now go on to discuss.

Principles of post-structuralism

Like feminism, post-structuralism is difficult to characterise in a few pages because it is not a monophonic philosophy or a single theoretical framework. Rather, the history of post-structuralism as a form of textual and discursive inquiry (and the greater cultural movement of post-modernism of which it is a part) has generated diverse, lengthy and competing accounts of itself. However, this does not mean to say that post-structuralism lives up to its popular but negative stereotype (Francis, 1999) of 'anything goes'. Rather, it is associated with a loose collection of common principles that make it identifiable and yet self-reflexively a theoretical discourse in its own right. Below, I outline three of the most significant principles that particularly

relate to my previous discussion of feminism: scepticism towards universal causes and 'grand narratives'; the contestation of meaning; and the discursive construction of subjectivity. I shall begin by discussing the first principle within the broader context of *post-modernism* in order to clarify the epistemological origins of post-structuralist theory.

Scepticism towards universal causes

Post-modernism is sceptical of the grand claims and exclusive rights put forward by most paradigms of knowledge, whether these be invested within religion, science, politics, or large-scale social movements. It questions the plausibility of Enlightenment ways of thinking and conducting research that premise their theories on 'grand narratives that unified and structured Western science, grounding truth and meaning in the assumption of a universal subject and universal goal of emancipation' (Elliott, 1996: 19). This is because, in Foucault's (1980: 109–33) terms, the Enlightenment preoccupation with the 'will to truth' is also a 'will to power', and any guiding belief or paradigm of knowledge, however benign, inevitably systematises itself into a 'regime of truth'. In simpler terms, it is like saying that my superior knowledge of the world enables me to hold power over you and your inferior knowledge. Conversely, post-modernist theory questions what 'true' or 'real' knowledge is, expresses a loss of certainty about the existence of absolutes, and is sceptical of all universal claims and causes. In line with this theoretical perspective, post-modernism is likely to be suspicious of any large-scale, emancipatory projects such as feminism.

In terms of research practices, post-modernist theory has challenged the positivist view that there is a determinate, material world that can be definitively known and explained (Elliott, 1996; Foucault, 1972; Lyotard, 1984). Post-modernism does not accept that it is possible to know the world by dissecting it through apparently objective methods of inquiry. Rather, it considers that knowledge is always constructed not discovered; contextual not foundational; singular, localised and perspectival rather than totalising or universal; and egalitarian rather than hierarchical. Post-modernism also questions the way that modernist theories are coded by language and discourse into binary or hierarchical oppositions such as mind/body, masculinity/femininity, theory/practice and public/private. Foucault (1979, 1984)

has argued that practices of social regulation and control are rooted in the organisation of knowledge according to irreconcilable binary opposites that are not natural but discursively constructed. In every case, dominant discourses ensure that one pole of opposites is privileged over the other (e.g. objectivity over subjectivity in scientific discourse; masculinity over femininity in patriarchal discourse). This polarising and hierarchical ordering of constructs contributes to the formation of grand narratives that become normalising in character and exclusionary in principle. Thus even the most well-intentioned, humanitarian or egalitarian enterprises (such as Christianity or indeed feminism), in their drive to 'open people's eyes', are *potentially* constituted by elitist, divisive and marginalising practices. In contrast, post-modernist theory advocates the kinetic interplay of multiple but competing theoretical positions, where one form of knowledge is free to enrich, complement, challenge or contest any other.

In the light of its scepticism towards universal causes, feminist theorists (e.g. Balbus, 1987; Davies, 1997; Francis, 1999; Hartsock, 1990) have debated whether post-modernist theory can have any interest at all in social transformation. In consequence, it has been variously criticised as relativist, value-free, nihilistic, cynical, 'a fallacy' and hypocritical in supporting its own 'grand narrative' which specifies sets of insights about the nature of order and meaning. In the later section, 'Feminist post-structuralism?' (p.28), I argue that this is a rather limited and resistant view of post-modernism and post-structuralist theory in particular, which fails to appreciate its transformative potential for social projects which are pragmatic, specific, localised, contextual and issue-orientated.

The contestation of meaning

Post-structuralism, as a branch of post-modernism, has a particular interest in critiquing the ways in which competing forms of knowledge, and the power interests these serve, aspire to fix meaning once and for all. The seminal work of the French theorists Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida has contributed interrelated yet contrasting perspectives on the ways in which cultural practices are constituted by the struggle to produce, stabilise, regulate, challenge and resist dominant meanings.

Common to both Derrida (e.g. 1976, 1987) and Foucault (e.g. 1972, 1980) is their recognition that social meanings are continuously

negotiated and contested through language and discourse. In their view, no form of knowledge can be separated from the structures, conventions and conceptuality of language as inscribed in discourses and texts. Post-structuralism inherits from Saussure (1974), the French structuralist, the principle that meaning is produced *within* language rather than reflected *by* language, and that individual signs (whether in speech, writing or other forms of text) do not have intrinsic meaning but acquire meanings through their relationship with, and difference from, other signs. However, it is from Derrida's (1978, 1987) conception of *différance*, in which meaning is produced through the dual concepts of *différance* and *deferral*, that theorists have developed an understanding of language in a perpetual state of flux. For structuralists, signs are divided into 'signifiers' (e.g. words, sounds, visual images) and 'signifieds' (concepts), neither of which have intrinsic meaning. Rather, their identity emerges in their *différance* from other words, sounds or images, but, as Derrida argues, this identity is in turn subject to endless *deferral*. By this he means that the meaning of any representation can only be fixed temporarily as it depends upon its discursive context. Signifiers are always located within a discursive context, so that the temporary fixing of meaning which comes from the reading of an image, word or text will be dependent upon that particular context. Texts are constantly open to rereading and reinterpretation, both within the particular context and, of course, when/if they are shifted to other contexts. Thus, the meaning of texts can never finally be fixed as knowable and immutable but is always a 'site' for contestation and redefinition by different readings within different contexts. Derrida placed a particular emphasis upon the way any text, by virtue of the range of readings to which it is subject, becomes the medium for struggle among different power interests to fix meaning permanently. Derrida's (1976, 1978) theories on *deconstructive* criticism – which attend to the plurality and non-fixity of meaning – are useful to feminism because they offer a method of questioning and decentring the hierarchical oppositions that underpin gender, race and class oppression, and suggest a way to instigate new, more challenging ways of reading texts.

Like Derrida, Foucault (1984) sought to understand the complex relationship between language and power, but placed a particular emphasis on the notion of *discourses*. His view was that language as a system does not represent experience in a transparent and neutral

way but always exists within historically specific discourses. These discourses are often contradictory, offering competing versions of reality, and serving different and conflicting power interests. Such power interests usually reside within large-scale institutional systems such as the law, justice, government, the media, education and the family. Thus, it is a range of institutional discourses that provides the network by which dominant forms of social knowledge are produced, reinforced, contested or resisted. As discourses always represent and constitute different political interests, these are constantly vying with each other for status and power. Foucault (1984: 100), like Saussure (1974), resists a modernist conceptualisation of discourse in terms of dualities or opposites, but prefers a more fluid, dynamic strategic interpretation:

We must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies . . . Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.

According to Foucault, one critical site of struggle to determine dominant social meanings is the subjectivity, or socially constructed identity of the individual.

The discursive construction of subjectivity

Post-structuralism has a particular interest in the discursive construction of human identities. This is because it has sought to challenge and decentre the liberal-humanist construct of a rational individual or knowing subject, occupying an 'Archimedean point' that transcends the particularities of history or sociocultural location. As I have noted, humanist discourses presuppose an *essence* at the core of the individual, which is unique, fixed and coherent, and which makes a person recognisably possess a character or personality. Conversely, post-structuralist theory argues that individuals are never outside cultural forces or discursive practices but always 'subject' to them. Their identities are determined by a range of 'subject positions' ('ways of being'), approved by their culture, and made available to them by means of the particular discourses operating within a given discursive context.

So, for example, within the classroom context, students are subject to a range of institutional discourses offering knowledge about 'approved ways to be', in terms of their behaviour, their learning and teacher-student relationships. But of course, not all discourses are institutionally approved or regulated. Competing or resistant discourses will also be constituted by peer value systems and will partly govern peer identities and relationships both in and out of the classroom. These discourses will be interwoven with broader societal discourses, embracing competing perspectives, on age, gender, ethnicity, class and the like. Thus a female student may be subject to various competing discourses within the classroom offering sets of positions relating to her age, gender, ethnicity and so on, as well as her participation as a student and membership of a peer group. Individuals are therefore shaped by the possibility of multiple (although not limitless) subject positions within and across different and competing discourses. Furthermore, the formation and reformation of identity is a continuous process, accomplished through actions and words rather than through some fundamental essence of character. Belsey (1980: 132) has suggested that individuals must be thought of as, 'unfixed, unsatisfied... not a unity, not autonomous, but a process, perpetually in construction, perpetually contradictory, perpetually open to change'.

Begging the question within this discussion is the extent to which post-structuralist theory accepts a concept of 'agency': a measure of individual awareness or control over the means by which subjects are 'interpellated' ('called into existence'; Althusser, 1971) into a range of subject positions made available by different discursive contexts. So, what is the relationship between discourse and the human subject implied by post-structuralist theory? How much 'control' do individuals have over their ways of being in the world? In a sense, this is a modernist concern, echoing past feminist debates (e.g. Fraser and Nicholson, 1990; Ramazanoglu, 1993) on the implications of Foucault's writings for female subjectivity, in which the human agent exists only in some sort of compliance or resistance to discourse. The question is one to which Foucault appears to have no clear answers. He suggests that it is not the task of the theorist to address the complexity of the world as experienced by the human subject. Moreover, in his discussion of the question, 'What is an author?' in terms of written texts, Foucault explicitly urges theorists that, 'it is

a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analysing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse' (1984: 118). His work has therefore tended to discuss the history and functions of discourse without reference to subjective experience, intentionality or personal aspiration, and furthermore to criticise the constraints that the issue of subjectivity places upon the historical questions he raises about discourse. Unfortunately, Foucault's rather 'macho' approach to the whole question of agency does not help feminists interested in the applications of post-structuralism.

The issue of agency, its importance to feminism and its implications for feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis will be the subject of succeeding sections in this chapter. What is germane to this part of the discussion is that the simultaneous way in which individuals can position themselves and be positioned by power relations is critical to an understanding of how identities are constructed. If Foucault (1980: 87) is coy on the issue of subjectivity specifically, he nonetheless attributes a degree of agency to people's complex relationship with power, which is:

never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation.

Post-structuralists have argued that individuals are not uniquely positioned, but are produced as a 'nexus of subjectivities' (e.g. Davies and Banks, 1992; Walkerdine, 1990: 2-3), in relations of power that are constantly shifting, rendering them at times powerful and at other times powerless. Thus, it may be that the same individuals are powerful within one discursive context or powerless within another; or, far more subtly, that people shift continuously within the *same* discursive context so that they experience positions of relative powerfulness and powerlessness either concurrently or in rapid succession. Indeed, Walkerdine (1990) has ably illustrated this in her analysis of a stretch of spoken discourse in the classroom (also see Chapter 2, p. 46), in which two kindergarten boys taunt a young female teacher. In the teacher's embarrassed handling of the boys'

sexualised and abusive comments towards her, she is shown to be both powerful in acting out her superior status as a teacher and yet powerless as a woman in her inability to resist their sexist constructions of her. It is precisely for issues such as this that the need now arises for a theoretically precise framework, which draws on a blend of feminist and post-structuralist principles for the purpose of analysing the complexities and ambiguities within much spoken interaction.

Feminist post-structuralism?

It is clear from the preceding discussion that there could be no obvious partnership between modernist feminism and post-structuralism, at least as it is conceived by male theorists such as Foucault and Derrida. There are theoretical contradictions in terms of the conception of the role of emancipatory causes, the individual's place in the world and the relationship between language and meaning. While modernist feminism supports a liberal-humanist belief in a unified notion of woman as an authentic being, post-structuralist feminism has posited that being recognised as female is but one effect of the multiple ways in which individual identities are constituted through discourse. Whereas modernist feminism unifies itself around the Enlightenment cause of freedom from male oppression, post-structuralism has strategically opposed any grand or universalising cause which attempts to appropriate and fix social meanings in its own image. Finally, while it has been a foundational view of feminism that the conditions of women's oppression exist in a bodily, material and pre-discursive sense, post-structuralist theory has, in its most parodic form, suggested that, 'bodies are constructed out of cultural forces in the same manner, that, say, telephones are put together' (Soper, 1993a, b). In other words, controversially, post-structuralism contests the notion that femininity and female oppression have a material or emotional reality *outside* discourse.

At least two of the more dominant themes within recent feminist theory indicate the controversy about feminist post-structuralism that currently exists within the academy itself. The first has been an internally subversive concern with feminist epistemology. Bucholtz (1999) has argued that the theorisation of gender within many areas of linguistics has lagged behind the theorisation of gender and feminist

epistemology in other social sciences. This has perhaps accounted for a relatively recent debate on feminism's own conceptual frameworks and basic terminology including the uncritical use of words like 'sex', 'gender', 'woman', 'male' and 'female' (e.g. Butler, 1990; Cameron, 1997b; Eckert, 1989; Gal, 1995; Moi, 1999; West, 2002). It has been suggested in certain cases (e.g. Bergvall *et al.*, 1996) that contemporary feminism may have fallen into patriarchy's own trap of employing the oppressor's own gender-differentiated terms to construct its experiences. The second theme has been a profuse rebuttal (e.g. Francis, 1999; Hartsock, 1990; Moi, 1999; Ransom, 1993) of the feminist post-structuralist quest which is apparently to decentre the female voice, its sense of unique experience, and in particular its need to articulate women's experiences of subjugation. Hartsock, for example, has questioned the timeliness of this (1990: 163-4):

Why is it, just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subject-hood becomes problematic? Just when we are forming our own theories of the world, uncertainty emerges about whether the world can be theorised...just when we are talking about the changes we want, ideas of progress and the possibility of systematically and rationally organising human society become dubious and suspect?

Do comments such as this suggest that a feminist post-structuralist approach to research is likely to be at best an uneasy compromise or at worst a contradiction in terms? Must the attempt by feminists to use the more complex ideas of post-structuralism necessarily lead to 'a paralysing ambivalence for feminist activists' as Jones (1993) has warned? I argue in the next section that the potential for feminist transformative projects and therefore *change* within the post-structuralist paradigm has been both misunderstood and underestimated. But for change to be possible, there must be a readiness for a less defensive, more multi-faceted and resilient version of feminism, that retains connections with its founding principles, yet is simultaneously capable of critiquing, informing and undermining itself with new insights and possibilities. This is very much the social constructionist version, which has many aspects in common both with 'third wave' feminism (Mills, 2002) as well as with feminist post-structuralism. I shall be referring tangentially to Mills' six aspects below (multiple

identities, the performative nature of gender, context-specific gender issues, co-construction, power as a net, notions of resistance, see p. 5) as I propose the case for feminist post-structuralism under the following three headings: revisiting the subjective, the role of deconstructive projects, and the potential for transformative projects.

Revisiting the subjective

For feminists, subjectivity, and the ways in which gendered identities are constructed through discourse, has been at the heart of much recent theoretical discussion (e.g. Bergvall *et al.*, 1996; Hall and Bucholtz, 1995; Johnson and Meinhof, 1997; Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002; Talbot, 1998). As such, the issue of subjectivity should be of critical importance in any form of feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis. While post-structuralist theory does not recognise the category of 'woman' as fixed and unchanging, it is certainly not suggesting that individuals are merely the passive, unstable, fragmented products of competing discourses. Although 'the subject' in post-structuralism is always socially constructed *within* discourses, Weedon (1997) argues that s/he:

nonetheless exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices.

In other words, feminist post-structuralism does not deny women's lived, embodied reality, nor their subjective experiences, since the ways in which individuals make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding the ways in which gendered discourses continue to structure social relations. Furthermore, feminist post-structuralism concurs with the social constructionist view that identities are continuously *performed*: that is, gender (for example) 'has constantly to be reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts in accordance with cultural norms... which define masculinity and femininity' (Cameron, 1997b: 49). Identities also have to be *co-constructed*: that is, evolve partially from a process of *affiliation* to particular beliefs and social groups, and partially from the *attributions* or ascriptions of others (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999). However, it is in the conceptualisation of a woman's consciousness, agency or ability to act for herself that feminist post-structuralism

differs from modernist and indeed social constructionist versions of feminism by centralising her subjectivity as a *site* contested in discourse. According to this conceptualisation, individuals neither conform to the liberal-humanist conception of the free individual in control of their destiny, nor to the binary notion of a co-constructed subject. Rather, they are positioned in a fluid, dynamic, contextual relation with competing constructs of identity. Constructs such as masculinity and femininity are continuously being contested by dominant social discourses, which vie with each other to fix the meaning of these constructs permanently. But, rather than viewing individuals as being at the mercy of these competing discourses, they can be seen as *multiply* positioned in terms of their agency to adapt to, negotiate or resist dominant subject positions or, alternatively, take up subject positions within a resistant discourse. Ransom (1993: 134) gives an example of how this works in practice by considering the contested site of women who are also mothers:

discursive constructions of the perfect mother exist, but are challenged by competing feminist conceptions of what women can be or of the ways in which women can be mothers. Women's identity as mothers is contested; a woman can resist the traditional discourse of motherhood by refusing to be a mother, by setting up alternative parenting arrangements, by taking her children on 'reclaim the night' marches or doing an evening course in roofing.

Thus, feminist post-structuralist theory is concerned to identify the versions of subjective reality available to women, and the competing social and political interests which sustain these versions. It aims to describe and critique these different versions of femininity, as well as the multiple but not unlimited range of subject positions pertaining to each version. For individual women, it can offer an explanation of where our experiences have come from, why these are often contradictory or inconsistent, and why and how these can be changed. In other words, the social and historical constitution of the subject is not a limit on women's agency but a precondition for understanding the possibilities for action and change. In Ransom's (1993) words, 'it is because of, not in spite of, women's embeddedness in discursive practices that critical awareness of change is possible'.

Just as feminist post-structuralism critiques the view of woman as a fixed, unchanging category, so it must take issue with the notion of

females as the universal *victims* of male oppression. As discussed earlier, Butler (1990), among others, has highlighted the issue of *difference* between women in criticising feminism for its failure to acknowledge the intersection of gender with race, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality and other currents of cultural identity, with the effect that many women fail to empathise with the movement. But it is not simply a matter of differences in the complex construction of identities. Francis (1999), while no fan of feminist post-structuralism, has pointed out that modernist feminism is no longer capable of describing the complexities of the experiences of numerous girls and women who, these days, are often successful both educationally and professionally. In the studies that follow (see Chapters 5 and 7), there are substantive examples of women/girls not only resisting positions of powerlessness but also actively taking up more powerful subject positions relative to men/boys. I shall be arguing, therefore, that theories of females as universal victims of patriarchy no longer *do*. The philosophy of feminist post-structuralism does not share the feminist quest to expose the gendered nature of society or the structural inequalities it produces. This is because feminist post-structuralism appreciates the unevenness and ambiguities of power relations between males and females. Women/girls are perceived to be *multiply* positioned as variously powerful or powerless within and across a range of competing discourses. However, this does not mean that feminist post-structuralism considers males and females to be equivalently positioned in terms of the ways in which power is negotiated through gender relations. Its focus is upon the *pervasiveness* of dominant discourses of gender differentiation which often interact with other discourses to 'fix' women/girls in positions of relative powerlessness, despite 'breakthrough' moments of *resistance* and empowerment. Feminist post-structuralism is thus concerned to equip feminist researchers with the thinking to 'see through' the ambiguities and confusions of particular discursive contexts where females are located as simultaneously powerful and powerless. For example, the classroom study in Chapter 5 shows that there appears to be a range of quite *powerful* subject positions available to girls in this classroom, yet, at the same time, a discourse of gender differentiation is constantly working to undermine the possibilities of such power. A feminist post-structuralist approach to discourse analysis can highlight and critique the contradictions and tensions that girls

experience as subjects/speakers in the classroom. It can also foreground the ways in which girls take up (or can be encouraged to take up) subject/speaker positions which allow them to contest or resist more powerless ways of being.

The role of deconstructive projects

One of the major enterprises of feminist post-structuralist theory has been the deconstruction of female subjectivity and the analysis of the extent to which women's experiences of themselves as subjects may be constructed within discourses, practices and power relationships. Feminists have drawn, for example, on various forms of psychoanalytic theory to try to understand the ways in which 'femininity' and female subjectivity are constructed and shaped (e.g. Irigaray, 1985; Kristeva, 1984; Mitchell, 1974). More recently, this has developed into a parallel interest in male subjectivities and the construction of masculinities (e.g. Benwell, 2002; Johnson and Meinhof, 1997; Mac An Ghail, 1994) in the light of educational issues such as 'boys and underachievement' in Britain (e.g. Baxter, 1999; Epstein *et al.*, 1998) and hegemonic fears of Western masculinity being in a state of crisis (e.g. Miller, 1996; Skelton, 1998).

Feminist post-structuralist theory is also concerned with deconstructing discourses of gender differentiation in general. Rather than viewing male dominance and female subordination as a universal phenomenon determining all aspects of women's lives, it considers that a dominant discourse of gender differentiation has, at different times and within different places, produced inequalities within gender relations. However, while gender differentiation is, to a large extent, historically accreted and geographically widespread, this discourse is not some kind of fixed, reified, monolithic entity, rather, it is a shape-shifter, taking a multiplicity of forms and guises, and always open to contestation, reconfiguration and redefinition. Deconstruction, as an analytical tool, can be used to identify, describe and explain the plural and diverse forms and practices of gender differentiation within different cultures, societies or communities. For example, discourses of gender differentiation undoubtedly produce widely contrasting subject positions, and different interpretations of inequality, for women within certain repressive, fundamentalist Muslim regimes (such as the Taliban in Afghanistan before 2002), to those of, say, white, British women working in the business world

(see Chapters 6 and 7). Clearly, this is not only because discourses of gender differentiation vary from one cultural setting to another, but also because they do not act alone. Discourses are vying with equally powerful, competing discourses (linked with specific cultural practices such as religion or company ethos) to fix meanings within such contexts. Thus, deconstructionist methods contribute to feminist post-structuralist theory by helping to expose the distinctive features and practices of gender differentiation within specific, localised contexts, and to reveal how such discourses simultaneously produce tensions between, and connections with, competing discourses in these contexts. In sum, a deconstructionist approach shows how discourses on gender never function alone to fix meaning within any single context but are always interacting with other discourses for control over the production of social meanings.

We noted earlier how the deconstructive tendencies of post-structuralist theory have been received as a mixed blessing by feminists. For example, Hartsock (1990) fears that post-structuralism's untimely quest to turn the deconstructionist spotlight upon feminism's own terms of reference may erode the movement's sometimes precarious sense of unity, voice and purpose. In response to this, Sawaki (1991) makes a robust case to argue that a Foucauldian approach in particular can offer a useful alternative to feminist analyses which adopt over-monolithic notions of male power and male control of women, or which retain utopian visions of attaining female autonomy. She suggests that feminists have at times been blind to their own dominating and oppressive tendencies, and that it is necessary to be aware of this for two reasons. First, women themselves are implicated in many forms of oppression of others, for example white women on southern USA slave plantations in the 1800s, or highly paid business women whose success may be partly dependent upon the exploitation of low-paid male and female workers. Secondly, feminist thinking and practice have at times been guilty of their own divisive and exclusionary tendencies and it is for this reason that the examination of feminist epistemological assumptions is necessary. For example, certain forms of feminist theory have unthinkingly used the concept of 'woman' in a way that generalises, stereotypes and elides differences between individual women. Furthermore, these feminist theorists' very use of such sex-differentiated categories have effectively 'bought into' the male establishment's practice of dichotomising the sexes

that has simply perpetuated notions of gender difference, separation and therefore inequality. Also, the feminist tendency to promote female autonomy as an ideal can be seen as suspect, because, according to Butler (1990: 326), it echoes hegemonic constructs where being an autonomous subject is a masculine cultural prerogative from which women have already been excluded. In addition, the construct of the autonomous female may discriminate against certain women in that it sets a 'sheep and goats' standard by which to honour those who apparently achieve autonomy, and to patronise, help or pity those who are deemed not to be 'whole women'.

The post-structuralist recognition that feminism is itself riven with power relations, coupled with the argument that feminism needs to be self-reflexive in regulating its own theory and practices, should not, in my view, be perceived as problematic, dubious or indeed a 'pessimistic' insight (Cain, 1993). Rather, it is to suggest that all forms of knowledge, in their passion to convince, are accompanied by the evangelical tendency to marginalise, silence and exclude. The deconstructive project merely reminds theorists to be more self-aware of the limitations of their particular perspective and to explore the possibilities of self-subversion and the inclusion of more than one perspective within their work.

A transformative project?

An overall aim of this book is to argue that the post-structuralist perspective does have a strong contribution to make to all forms of feminist research. It will challenge the idea that the transformative suppositions of feminism and the deconstructive elements of post-structuralism should be regarded as in any way a contradiction in terms. Alternatively, I am arguing that a feminist post-structuralist stance is able to substantiate a theoretically and politically confident feminism.

Theorists (e.g. Davies, 1997; Francis, 1999; Jones, 1993, 1997; Wetherell, 1998) have debated whether post-structuralism can ever be compatible with a transformative project like feminism, because any such project represents 'a will to power'. While it is certainly the case that post-structuralism cannot support universalising causes such as the emancipation of all women – even supposing this is still actually necessary – this does not mean that it should conform to the popular,

nihilistic stereotype that 'anything goes'. This is because post-structuralism has never claimed to be value-free. Rather, it is associated with a loose collection of insights that makes it identifiably yet self-reflexively a theoretical discourse in its own right. For example, it has an interest in connection, recognition, flexibility, richness, diversity, action and transformation, as long as these insights on the production of order and meaning never amount to a grand narrative. Post-structuralist inquiry *can* support reconstructive projects articulating visions of the future, provided that at least two conditions pertain. First, there should be a constant vigilance and readiness to deconstruct a new cause. In other words, feminist theorists must recognise that within any new modes of resistance and self-understanding, or within any intention to transform social relations, there is the danger of reinstating aspects of that 'Other' against which they are struggling. Secondly, theorists should be constantly on guard and self-reflexive about their stated values within different research contexts. It is on this 'deconstructive' basis, I would argue, that feminist post-structuralist inquiry – with its particular interest in the oppressive workings of discourses of gender differentiation – *can* support social transformations because these are implicated in the important task of challenging and eroding grand narratives. Indeed, Foucault (1984: 46) does theorise the possibility of transformative projects within a post-modernist framework, although not consistently and adequately enough to satisfy many feminist theorists (e.g. Francis, 1999; Ransom, 1993; Soper, 1993b). Nevertheless, he does not dispute the importance of transformative social projects such as feminism, as long as these do not claim to be global or radical in the following sense:

I prefer the very specific transformations that have proved possible in the last twenty years in a certain number of areas that concern our ways of being and thinking: insanity or illness; I prefer even these partial transformations that have been in the correlation of historical analysis and the practical attitude to the programs for a new man (sic) that the worst political systems have repeated through the twentieth century.

Drawing on the work of Bakhtin (1981), Derrida (1987) and Foucault (1980), I propose that post-structuralist inquiry may indeed support feminist projects with an intent to liberate subjugated groups as long as these aim to promote the free play of multiple voices within

diverse contexts. This means that the voices of *minority* or *oppressed* groups need to be heard clearly alongside those of more dominant groups, adding to, undercutting and potentially overturning the status quo. The problem with mainstream discourses is that they seek univocally to silence, displace and suppress the interplay of alternative or oppositional voices. A dominant discourse serves to inhibit and foreclose the possibilities for an interplay of multiple-voices, perspectives and narratives representing the interests and values of diverse groups. This is not just the usual post-structuralist jargon: there is a real message. The post-structuralist 'quest', and I use that word advisedly, is to create spaces to allow the voices of relatively silenced groups such as certain categories of women (or indeed the disabled, the gay community, ethnic minority groups) to be heard with ringing clarity.

A common response to post-structuralist philosophy of this kind runs along the lines of, 'Because post-structuralism cannot be judged mental about *which* minority groups should have their voices heard in the public arena, does it not give a voice to extremist groups (e.g. of a fascist, violent or racist persuasion) who would not normally be tolerated within democratic societies?' The answer to this is quite simple: such groups are rarely concerned with voicing their own views *alongside* those of others; they are driven by a totalising mission to *become* the dominant discourse – to dismantle and overturn other voices, knowledge, discourses and social structures, supplanting them with their own. A much more ambiguous case perhaps can be illustrated by an example I heard recently in the news. A group of anorexic women, who communicate with each other via their own internet website, were arguing that they should have the 'right' to starve themselves to death if they so chose. While such a viewpoint was presented by the news report as 'unhealthy', deviant and a contravention of the common-sense discourse that 'mentally sick people/neurotic women must be helped to get better, by force if necessary', a feminist, post-structuralist perspective would argue that this marginalised group should be, at the very least, allowed the space to make their case alongside and in opposition to other voices. This does not mean that each perspective is equally valid, but each has a point of view and should be interrogated from a stance which accepts that no perspective is producing disinterested knowledge, and each represents particular positions within power relations (Usher, 1996). It is only by welcoming a plurality of opinions on

emotive issues such as this that greater recognition, understanding, tolerance, connection and co-existence can be achieved between apparently conflicting viewpoints, interests and experiences.

The notion of 'voice' is particularly associated with Bakhtin's (1981) views on *polyphony*, which call attention to the co-existence in any discursive context of a plurality of voices that do not fuse into a single consciousness but rather, exist in different registers, generating a 'dialogic' dynamism among themselves. Bakhtin's concept of *polyphony* is supplemented by that of *heteroglossia*, with its support for non-official viewpoints, those of the marginalised, the oppressed and the peripheralised. Bakhtin's views are therefore very much in tune with the feminist liberatory quest both to deconstruct social injustices that permeate gender discourses, as well as to reconstruct spaces in which silenced women can speak. All these concepts are defined and explored more fully as part of the FPDA methodology in Chapter 3.

Foucault offers an alternative perspective on transformative projects which is not expressed in the personalised terms of 'voices', but rather in terms of bringing to light repressed or subjugated *knowledges*. However, there is an interconnected point. He is concerned that certain types of knowledge need to be made more visible by research communities. On the one hand, Foucault refers to 'blocks of historical knowledge which were present but disguised' in academic discourse (1980: 81-2), and on the other hand, 'a whole set of knowledges which have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated' or even 'directly disqualified'. Foucault gives an example of the subjugated knowledge of the psychiatric patient as an example, but there are many equivalent examples within feminist inquiry, for example, the knowledge generated by women artists, writers and musicians from previous ages whose work has been repressed or lost. Foucault (1980: 83-4) suggests that if researchers can bring these localised and popular knowledges to light on behalf of suppressed groups, it allows these groups to engage with power more effectively because at least their knowledge has been named and is therefore rendered more publicly visible. His advocacy of a 'geneological' approach to research, that is, a critical tracing of the descent or 'archaeology' of different discourses, is in order to:

entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise

and order them in the name of some true knowledge... it is really against the effects of the power of a discourse that is considered to be scientific that geneology must wage its struggle.

From a feminist perspective, it is in line with this kind of transformation that the realist feminist Cain (1993: 90) argues that scholars need to recognise the existence of the 'unformulated experience' among subjugated peoples. She suggests that it is not just that already formed discourses are politically repressed, but also that the play of relations of domination and subordination means that some experiences do not as yet have a voice at all. On the basis of her belief in a 'pre-discursive reality', which opens a door for the possibility of a profoundly female experience within a material world, Cain argues that feminist post-structuralist inquiry should do a 'midwiving job in relation to an emergent discourse'. It should have a mission to reveal the unthought relations and unformulated experiences of 'vulnerable and subjugated people for whose concerns Foucault so passionately wished to create a space for legitimacy' (1993: 84).

From a post-structuralist perspective, I would question Cain's dependence upon a pre-discursive reality in order to press her case for the need to bring emergent discourses to light, in that these must always be constructed intertextually from other discourses at whatever point they emerge into individual or collective consciousness. However, I would go along with Cain's view that feminist inquiry should take an interest in 'discourses in the making'. I have already argued how important it is to promote an understanding of the complex and often ambiguous ways in which women/girls are simultaneously positioned as relatively *powerless* within a range of dominant discourses on gender, but as relatively *powerful* within alternative and competing social discourses. It is in the awareness of the potential for expression and self-empowerment, contained in the spaces *between* conflicting discourses and in the temporary moments of *powerfulness within* discourses, that the opportunities for resistance and transformation lie. In other words, oppressed groups are not permanently trapped into silence, victimhood or knee-jerk refusal by dominant discursive practices; rather, there are moments within discourse in which to convert acts of resistance into previously unheard, but nonetheless intertextualised forms of 'new' expression. Feminist post-structuralist research is not, therefore, just about

deconstructive critique, although this should always be part of any transformative project. It must also have a libertarian impulse to release the words of marginalised or minority voices in order to achieve the richness and diversity of textual play that only emerges from the expression of different and competing points of view. In Sawaki's (1991: 44) words:

Freedom lies in our capacity to discover the historical links between certain modes of self-understanding and modes of domination, and to resist the ways in which we have already been classified and identified by dominant discourses. This means discovering new ways of understanding ourselves and one another, refusing to accept the dominant culture's characterisations of our practices and desires, and redefining them from within resistant cultures.

Here, feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis has a range of specific functions to perform, apart from traditional deconstruction, in its quest to locate and analyse gendered discourse where alternative or oppositional voices may be struggling to be heard. It must be prepared not only to 'press-release' the words of silent groups, but also to advertise and market them in a world saturated by information and with a short attention span. Modernist feminist inquiry has often been constituted by such features as the search for order, hierarchy, bipolarisation, a single, clear vision and planned purposefulness. In contrast, FPDA projects are likely to be more ephemeral, flexible, open-minded, heteroglossic, functional, active and media-orientated. Such projects are more concerned to help *release* the tentative, emergent nature of alternative voices and discourses rather than to supplant a dominant discourse with their own.

In summary, a feminist post-structuralist approach to discourse analysis is a workable partnership if both theoretical traditions are prepared to open themselves to critical self-questioning and supplement their standpoints with alternative or oppositional insights. In post-modernist spirit, I would argue that this complexity should be embraced for its richness of textual play, not disparaged for its lack of univocality. Of course there are theoretical dissonances between modernist feminism and post-structuralist inquiry, but there are also spaces for mutual connection and transformation. As I have mentioned, these points of connection are also apparent in the social constructionist approach to feminist research, also known as 'third

wave' feminism. Such versions of feminism have generally embraced the view that women/girls can no longer be appropriately cast as universal victims but should be reconstituted as potentially powerful in terms of their multiple positioning within different discourses. What a specifically *post-structuralist* approach offers feminism, with its emphasis upon specific and localised forms of transformative action, is a politically and theoretically confident approach to all forms of research inquiry. In the following chapters, I shall discuss more fully what feminist post-structuralism has to offer discourse analysis.

2 FPDA – A Supplementary Form of Discourse Analysis?

Introduction

Post-structuralist theorists, with their more global view, rarely have their noses pressed up against the exigencies of talk-in-interaction. Rarely are they called on to explain how their perspective might apply to what is happening right now, on the ground in this very conversation.

(Wetherell, 1998: 395)

In this and following chapters, I intend to connect the principles of feminist post-structuralism to the field of discourse analysis in order to explore what constitutes FPDA. In this chapter, I shall consider the relationship of FPDA with two more widely recognised approaches to spoken discourse analysis, conversation analysis (CA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Clearly, I recognise that proponents of CA and CDA, such as those mentioned in this chapter, would not necessarily wish to label or limit themselves to one specific 'school' of analysis, or characterise these paradigms as internally unified or mutually exclusive. In addition, there are many other varieties of discourse analysis, such as pragmatics, the ethnography of speaking and interactional sociolinguistics (see Cameron, 2001, for an overview), each with their own distinctive contributions to the field. I have selected CA and CDA for comparative focus for two reasons. First, it seems to be the case that CA and CDA are gaining increasing popularity as approaches chosen for conducting discourse analysis, notably in the field of language and gender. Secondly, there are a number of ways

in which I consider the FPDA approach to be intertextually linked with, and *supplementary* to, the methodologies of CA and CDA. The term 'supplementarity' (Derrida, 1976: 27–73) is used periodically within this chapter to convey the built-in dependencies and oppositions of any one theoretical paradigm with any other. In other words, each theoretical approach should be seen as both necessary to and yet simultaneously threatening to the identities of the others. Thus, having observed that FPDA has clear connections with CA and CDA, I shall also be suggesting that it offers the discourse analyst a distinctively *different* epistemological framework, and hence an alternative set of methodological strategies.

My observations about exactly which principles constitute an FPDA approach, and the extent to which FPDA is dependent upon, or contrasts with, CA and CDA, will be drawn from two sources. First, I shall be referring to several prototypical examples from the work of discourse analysts who have drawn upon a broadly feminist post-structuralist approach (e.g. Bergvall, 1998; Davies and Banks, 1992; Francis, 1998; Simpson, 1997; Walkerdine, 1990; Wetherell, 1998). Secondly, I shall be proposing principles and strategies that have evolved in the course of conducting my own research, later demonstrated in the classroom study (Chapters 4 and 5) and in the management team study (Chapters 6 and 7).

While FPDA is emerging in fields such as feminist studies and educational research as an analytical tool with which to investigate and evaluate 'real' samples of text and talk in context, it seems that it is still relatively underused within the broader field of linguistics. The gladiatorial contest in the journal *Discourse & Society* between the two prize fighters of discourse analysis, Schegloff (1999) in the blue corner representing CA, and the discursive psychologist, Billig (1999) in the red representing CDA, revealed this much. Little room is being allocated in the epistemological arena for *alternative* perspectives on discourse analysis, such as feminist post-structuralism, despite its use in other fields.

It is not the primary intention of this chapter to enter into the specificity of the CA/CDA debate, although my aim to situate my case for FPDA between the layers of this ongoing discussion must necessarily include all three perspectives in 'a community of relevance' (Schegloff, 1999: 579). Rather, in the spirit of supplementarity, which argues that no voice should be suppressed, displaced or privileged

over another, I shall set my own perspective *alongside* those of other analysts. In so doing, I shall necessarily contest the use of modernist, adversarial rhetoric that has to prove that one method of discourse analysis is 'better' than the others. Rather it will posit from an FPDA perspective that there is room in the epistemological arena for an interplay between multiple perspectives and accounts of discursive practice, which only come into being when each is heard alongside the others.

As an immediate illustration of this principle, I should explain that an earlier version of this chapter exists in article form (Baxter, 2002b; West, 2002) which incorporated a discussion between myself and Candace West about whether or not FPDA offers an *alternative* form of discourse analysis to CA. I was not wholly comfortable with the journal's prescription for the format of this discussion, which had to be constituted as a debate between two opposing points of view. This debate had a tripartite structure: my discussion making a case; West's response to my case; and my reply to her response. The substance of West's reply was essentially cast in adversarial terms, compelling me to adopt a position of defence, if not defensiveness. In my reply, I almost certainly failed to resist taking up an equally oppositional subject position, although the truth of the matter is that I learnt a great deal from West's deconstruction of my argument. This chapter therefore seeks more reflexively to offer a supplementary discussion of the relationship between FPDA and CA/CDA, having appreciated and assimilated West's comments and criticisms.

With this in mind, I shall argue that FPDA is not only a theoretically coherent paradigm in its own right, but also an effective tool for explaining 'what is happening right now, on the ground, in this very conversation'. As both Billig (1999) and Wetherell (1998) have argued, there are too many critical and (feminist) post-structuralist studies which pronounce on the nature of discourses without getting down to the business of what is actually uttered or written. This chapter will seek to argue that FPDA can and should offer a rigorous approach to micro-analysing 'the exigencies of talk-in-interaction'. Moreover, FPDA is a particularly illuminating means of describing, analysing and interpreting an aspect of spoken interaction perhaps overlooked by CA and CDA – the continuously fluctuating ways in which speakers, within any discursive context, are positioned as powerful or powerless by competing social and institutional discourses. Furthermore, it will

discuss how FPDA is *not* concerned with the modernist quest of seeking closure or resolutions in its analysis of what discourse means, but rather with foregrounding the diverse viewpoints, contradictory voices and fragmented messages that research data almost always represents.

Links and differences between CA, CDA and FPDA

In this section, I discuss the ways in which FPDA can be perceived as an alternative and supplementary approach to those of CA and CDA. While FPDA is in many ways closer to CDA than CA, there are a number of evident links and differences between all three approaches, as I now discuss. In so doing, it is important once again to stress that both CA and CDA should not necessarily be perceived as internally unified paradigms, but interconnected with a range of different disciplines, purposes and methods. For example, while CA's systematic *methodology* is potentially utilisable by a range of disciplines and theoretical standpoints, CDA is essentially a theoretical *perspective* with a particular value to multi- and interdisciplinary studies. The aim here is to compare the three approaches in terms of higher order principles, namely: definitions of discourse; micro-analysis of discourse; self-reflexivity; text and context; an emancipatory paradigm; and multi-disciplinarity.

Definitions of discourse

While the term 'discourse' is used routinely but not unambiguously within CDA and FPDA, it is not conspicuously a part of the foundational rhetoric of CA. Where the term 'discourse' is used by conversational analysts, it is most likely to connote Cameron's (2001) category of 'language in use'. In her terms, this is an overt concern with what and how language communicates when it is used purposefully in particular instances and contexts, and how conversation is negotiated and co-constructed by its participants. More specifically, CA theorists have traditionally been involved with the detailed and systematic examination of short extracts of text or talk in order to identify the intricate patterning in the way these are organised.

For CDA and FPDA, the term 'discourse' reaches well beyond traditional linguistic notions of 'language above the sentence level' (see Introduction) or indeed 'language in use'. According to Foucault (1972: 49), this term is used in the plural sense to denote 'practices

that systematically form the object of which they speak'. Thus, discourses are forms of 'knowledge' – powerful sets of assumptions, expectations, explanations – governing mainstream social and cultural practices. They are systematic ways of making sense of the world by determining *power relations* within all texts, including spoken interaction. Both CDA and FPDA view discourses as inextricably linked with concepts of power, not always as a negative, repressive force but very often as something that constitutes and energises all discursive and social relations.

However, within any field of knowledge, there is never just *one* discourse but always plural and competing discourses. Using ethnographic approaches, FPDA in particular specialises in the business of identifying the range of discourses at play within varying social contexts in order to ascertain the interwoven yet competing ways in which such discourses structure speakers' experiences of power relations.

Micro-analysis of discourse

Of the three approaches, CA is traditionally most associated with the micro-analysis of discourse, in other words, the commitment to analyse naturally occurring conversation, or 'talk-in-interaction', within a range of everyday settings. CA has traditionally tended to consider interactive talk (as opposed to monologic sequences, such as narratives) in a range of private, domestic or social settings. However, more recent work has also been conducted on talk in professional and workplace contexts (Drew and Heritage, 1992); media settings (e.g. Hutchby, 1996) and political speeches (Shaw, 2000). CA has been concerned to examine talk that is prototypically a joint enterprise involving more than one person, and involves a rule-governed sequence of conversational turns. Indeed, it is this feature of talk-in-interaction, known alternately as 'a simplest systematics for the organisation of turn-taking for conversation' or as 'the speech exchange system' (Sacks *et al.*, 1974), which has been the focus of much work by conversation analysts.

In fact, CDA and FPDA also have a keen interest in the micro-analysis of text or talk. In contrast to CA, however, CDA has until recently tended to opt for the bigger picture, preferring to conduct larger scale social analyses and critiques of discourses in public or institutional settings. Where CDA *has* adopted the methods of textual micro-analysis, it has tended to focus rather *less* on everyday,

interactive talk and rather *more* upon formal, monologic talk (such as political speeches, TV or radio news announcements) or the written word (such as newspaper reports, features, editorials). The fact that CDA analysts are now increasingly working with samples of 'real' talk-in-interaction (e.g. Wodak, 2002) is a self-confessed admission to the charge by conversation analysts that they 'rarely get down to the business of studying what is actually uttered or written' (Billig, 1999: 544).

Despite Wetherell's (1998) concern that post-structuralist analysts, like CDA theorists, 'rarely have their noses pressed up against the exigencies of talk-in-interaction', there are a number of prototypical approaches to FPDA which do get to grips with the micro-analysis of discourse. The four examples that follow all show the ways in which speakers are multiply positioned by competing discourses within any single context, sometimes as relatively powerful, and at other times as relatively powerless. In the first, often quoted example, Valerie Walkerdine (1990: 4–5) makes a detailed analysis of classroom interaction involving a female nursery schoolteacher and two four-year-old boys. She aims to show how the teacher is constituted simultaneously as both powerful as an authority figure, and powerless or disempowered as a woman/sex object, within just a few moments of conversation:

SEAN: Miss Baxter, knickers, show your knickers.

TERRY: Miss Baxter, show your bum off.

(They giggle.)

MISS BAXTER: I think you are both being very silly.

Here, Walkerdine argues from a feminist stance that the teacher has been 'made to signify as the powerless object of male sexual discourse'. Yet, from the greater complexity of a post-structuralist stance, she suggests that the two boys cannot 'simply' be conceptualised as powerless children oppressed by the authority of the teacher, who in turn represents 'the bourgeois educational institution'. Nor can they simply be understood as 'the perpetrators of patriarchal social relations'. In short, these boys have the potential to be produced as subjects in *both* discourses, as simultaneously powerful and powerless.

In the second example, Alyson Simpson (1997: 215) uses 'close linguistic analysis' to show the competing positions taken up by a six-year-old girl (Heather) within a 'family drama' while they are

taking part in a board game. She shows, through detailed analysis of the dynamics of the negotiation for control' on the dual levels of family relationships and game-playing, that there are continuous shifts in the negotiation for power. What is at stake, Simpson argues, is the construction of Heather's subjectivity which is in ceaseless process during the course of the game. Furthermore, Simpson foregrounds gender as a cause of feminist concern within this site of competing discourses:

For Heather, her positioning within the game conflicts with her positioning within the family. She does not have the power to challenge the rules of the game successfully so she chooses to abide by their restrictions. She could resist the gendered construction of her as 'good girl' but she chooses not to . . . It bothers me that she agrees to let [her father] win, positioning herself as 'a good girl'.

In the third example, the social psychologist Margaret Wetherell (1998: 395) argues that both CDA and post-structuralist approaches would do well to 'explain how their perspective might apply to what is happening right now, on the ground, in this very conversation'. She makes the case for a 'synthetic approach' to discourse analysis, which draws upon the combined strengths of CA's interest in the highly situated and occasioned nature of participants' orientations within spoken interaction, and CDA/post-structuralism's more 'sociopolitical' concerns with the assignment of subject positioning through discourse. Wetherell's detailed analysis of a group discussion between three young men also highlights gendered issues but, unlike the work of Walkerdine (1990) and Simpson (1997), does not select a feminist focus for specific analysis. Rather, it fulfils the post-structuralist quest to track:

the emergence of different and often contradictory or inconsistent versions of people, their characters, motives, states of mind and events in the world – and asking why this (different) formulation at this point in the strip of talk?

While there is certainly a merit in her challenging of theoretical boundaries, I am somewhat at odds with her modernist construction of post-structuralist discourse analysis as something akin to 'social learning' or 'sex role' theory. For Wetherell, subjects have a 'portfolio of positions' at their disposal, which 'remain available to be carried forward to the other contexts and conversations making up the 'long conversation'. These positions may be variously 'troubled' or 'untroubled'

by the flow of routine interaction. While there is much to be learnt from her detailed analysis, what is marginalised yet central to post-structuralist inquiry is a conceptualisation of the ways in which shifting power relations between speakers are constantly negotiated through the medium of competing discourses. I would argue that there are essentialist or at least volunteerist implications in the view that speakers have a 'portfolio' of subject positions, troubled or untroubled; namely, that speakers are able to *choose* which subject positions they might adopt or carry forward like acting roles to future conversations. The FPDA perspective would argue alternatively that speakers are able to take up, accommodate or resist relatively powerful or powerless subject positions made available within competing discourses at work within any given moment. The value of a detailed micro-analysis of spoken discourse for the FPDA theorist is that it can fulfil this quest to foreground and pinpoint the *moment* (or series of moments) when speakers negotiate their shifting subject positions.

In the final example, Victoria Bergvall (1998) demonstrates, again through close examination of spoken discourse, the complexities and ambiguities of experience for female engineering students in a traditionally masculine domain. She argues that women as a minority group in this community of practice are unable to conform to rigid notions of dichotomous gender. They must struggle continuously between multiple gender positions, some relatively empowering and others less so, in order to gain recognition and acceptance from their male colleagues. However, such complex struggles over gender identity are unlikely, in her view, to empower women in the long run, working to limit their success in pursuing an education and a career. The analysis takes the form of detailed attention to the ways in which female speakers co-construct varying identities for themselves according to context. Her methodology prefigures an FPDA approach, but does not demonstrate how subjects constantly *shift* between different positions of power, or different forms of identity, within a given moment or context. In her concluding comments, Bergvall (1998: 194) indicates the need for a form of analysis that is specifically equipped to explore the complexities of constructing and enacting multiple gender positions through discourse. This begins to sound like FPDA:

we need a theory of gender and language that is neither binary nor polarising, but situated and flexible, grounded in research that is based not only on the careful

examination of discrete linguistic structures, but also on the social settings in which such structures are embedded.

Self-reflexivity

All three approaches – FPDA, CA and CDA – have in common the conceptual awareness that they are *self-reflexive* about their development as ‘knowledges’. In other words, they all challenge the assumption in positivist research that there is an independent, knowable world unrelated to human perception and social practices. All three recognise that social realities are socially (CA) if not discursively (CDA and FPDA) produced. Indeed, as West (2002) points out, CA might be seen as a forerunner in this respect. Back in 1967, the ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel demonstrated the ‘essential’ reflexivity of people’s descriptions, including scientific descriptions of practical actions. In so doing, he showed that ‘the social constitution of knowledge cannot be analysed independently of the contexts of institutional activity in which it is generated and maintained’ (Heritage, 1984: 6). Thus for CA, a raised awareness of the ways in which speakers construct their social world by means of the ‘internally grounded reality’ of their talk-in-interaction challenges positivist assumptions about an externally verifiable reality as the basis for evidence.

CDA has taken a different direction from CA in its quest to challenge positivist research assumptions that research should necessarily be ideologically neutral in order to represent reality as ‘the truth’. In its upfront declaration of its political mission to eschew a spurious objectivity and instead ‘choose the perspective of those who suffer most’ (van Dijk, 1986: 4), CDA is explicitly self-referential about its value systems. Furthermore, CDA generally flags up and is prepared to meta-analyse its own use of a specialist rhetoric. Likewise FPDA, in post-structuralist spirit, must also draw attention to the constructedness of its own conceptual framework and ‘foundational rhetoric’ in relation to the subject of study. But in line with feminist ethnography (e.g. Skeggs, 1994), FPDA takes the principle of self-reflexivity one step further by likening the textualising process of research and discourse analysis to a literary form. In other words, the business of text-making will constitute the analyst as almost literally an author, with a certain control (and therefore, ethical responsibility) over his or her work of fiction. However, this ‘control’ is undercut by the limited number of subject positions made available to researchers according to the range

of available discourses determining authorial practices. FPDA practitioners are therefore expected to use ‘writerly’ (Barthes, 1977) strategies to draw attention to textual constructions as authorising practices by meta-analysing their own role in selecting and orchestrating their subject matter.

Text and context

Bergvall’s (1998: 194) comment that discourse analysis should be directed at ‘the social settings in which such structures are embedded’ highlights the interest of all three approaches in the interrelationship between text and context. Both CA and CDA, for example, accept the fundamentally contextual view of text and talk as being structured under the constraints of the social situation. However, CA, CDA and FPDA all construe the context dependency of discourse in quite contrasting ways.

Conversation Analysis, grounded in ethnomethodological principles, is renowned for its disinterest in the question of external social or natural causes and its ‘rejection of the side-step which takes the analyst immediately from the conversation to something seen as real and determining behind the conversation’ (Garfinkel, 1967; Wetherell, 1998: 391). Indeed, traditional conversation analysts consider it not just unnecessary but illegitimate to make use of information that the participants themselves have not chosen to ‘make relevant’ within the course of talk-in-interaction. Schegloff (1997: 166–7) suggests that the main object of CA’s investigation is always the ‘endogenous constitution’ of the conversation sequence itself and what this, and this alone, reveals about the participants:

... because it is the orientations, meanings, interpretations, understandings etc. of the participants in some socio-cultural event on which the course of that event is predicated – and especially if it is constructed interactionally over time, it is those characterisations which are privileged in the constitution of socio-interactional reality, and therefore have a *prima facie* claim to being privileged in efforts to understand it.

In other words, contextual categories (such as power or gender) are never *postulated a priori* in order to understand or explain the data until the participants in the conversation sequence *make* them relevant, either in what they say or do. Moreover, Schegloff (1997: 166) claims

that the internally grounded 'reality' of talk-in-interaction, made visible by utilising the methodology of the speech exchange system, offers discourse analysts a point of 'Archimedean leverage'. By this he means an indisputable reference point, an objective truth about discourse that provides a vital bulwark against the 'theoretical imperialism' of CDA or the infinite regress of post-structuralist complexity.

This perspective – that text defines context – is avowedly in direct opposition to CDA's mission to bring a 'critical' perspective upon the analysis of text or talk or, in van Dijk's (2001: 96) words, to conduct discourse analysis 'with an attitude'. Like its close associate, critical linguistics (e.g. Hodge and Kress, 1993; Wodak, 1989), CDA has always had an explicitly committed political agenda:

It focuses on social problems, and especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination. Wherever possible, it does so from a perspective that is consistent with the best interests of dominated groups. It takes the experiences and opinions of such groups seriously, and supports their struggle against inequality.

Thus, in CDA, the particular concerns relating to an ideologically sensitive context – whether it be the representation of race in mainstream sources such as press reports (van Dijk, 1986) or policies of gender mainstreaming in the European Union (Wodak, 2002) – are brought to bear upon an analysis of the data. But this act of critical discourse analysis is always done in a spirit of self-reflexivity, which makes pre-suppositions about time, space and setting explicit.

For FPDA, the interrelationship of text and context are conceptualised in terms of the operations of competing discourses. Both CDA and FPDA are interested in the workings of *power* through discourse, although they conceptualise this rather differently. CDA assumes discourse to work 'dialectically' (e.g. Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) in so far as the discursive act – text or talk – is shaped by, and thereby continuously reconstructs, 'real' or material events, situations, institutions and social structures. In contrast, FPDA adopts an anti-materialist stance in its view that discourses operate as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). In other words, social 'realities' are always discursively produced, so that, for example, text or talk is being continuously reconstructed and open to redefinition *through* discourse, not outside it. According to the post-structuralist

view, therefore, distinctions between text and context are collapsed in favour of the concept of intertextuality, that is, the ways in which texts are always infused and inscribed with traces of other texts.

An emancipatory paradigm?

Which of the three approaches operates within an emancipatory paradigm? The obvious answer appears to be CDA, although not without qualification in the case of each approach. I have discussed how CDA places an explicit emphasis upon emancipatory social theory on behalf of dominated and oppressed groups (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). This is in clear contrast to FPDA which expresses a loss of certainty about the existence of absolutes, or the benevolence or truth of any single paradigm or knowledge. In Foucault's memorable terms, any theory or research paradigm, by virtue of its emancipatory desire to be 'right', contains a 'will to power' and therefore a 'will to truth'. An emancipatory discourse, as it becomes established as mainstream, would in time become a 'totalising' or imperialist one, marginalising and silencing the voices of other theorists or researchers.

While CDA supports an emancipatory critical perspective, it is nonetheless alert to the possible dangers of its own critical orthodoxy, a point alluded to in a *Discourse & Society* editorial by Billig (2000: 292), who mused that 'the growth of respectability [for CDA] entails the loss of critique as an intellectual activity. Perhaps there is a need for continual intellectual revolution.' This self-reflexive deconstruction of one's own emancipatory position would be entirely in keeping with the FPDA paradigm. Indeed, FPDA has no quarrel with CDA's engaged and committed approach to research theory, provided that it is openly declared and made explicit at all stages of data analysis and interpretation.

It is this failure to declare its own ideological agenda that sets CA apart from CDA and FPDA. On the surface, it might appear that CA has something in common with FPDA in its ethnomethodological mission to eschew an emancipatory agenda. In CA's case, this 'eschewing' is conducted in the interests of 'sociological neutrality' in order to encourage a more egalitarian enterprise to emerge 'naturally' from the data. However, both CDA and FPDA openly recognise this declared act of 'naive methodological and epistemological naivety' (Schegloff, 1997: 171) to be just that – naive. In his exchange with Schegloff, Billig (1999: 546) drew attention to the ways in which conversation analysts attempted to naturalise their 'foundational rhetoric' in the

form of technical terms that describe 'objective' realities in an unproblematic way. He has argued that conversation analysts fail to recognise that there is an 'epistemological or rhetorical difficulty with the ways that CA translates the words of those it studies into its own technical vocabulary'. This, Billig suggests, is the paradox at the core of CA, which on one hand purports to study 'participants in their own terms', yet on the other uses highly technical terms to accomplish this analysis of speakers' own terms. Billig points out that these speakers do not themselves talk about 'adjacency pairs', 'preference structures', 'WH-questions' and so on, a specialist vocabulary to which discourse analysts would need a formalised initiation. It is this lack of self-reflexivity, this failure to acknowledge the sociological and ideological assumptions contained within any research process, this postulation of an 'Archimedean leverage' within texts which clearly distinguishes CA from CDA and FPDA.

For FPDA, does 'truth disappear in a hall of perspectival mirrors' as Schegloff (1997: 166) has suggested about post-structuralist theory? It is certainly the case that FPDA cannot have an emancipatory agenda in the sense that it espouses a grand narrative that becomes its own dominant discourse. Conversely, it must be continuously on guard, openly self-reflexive of its own agendas, values and assumptions. This does not mean, however, that feminist post-structuralist inquiry cannot support small-scale, bottom-up social transformations, which are indeed of central importance in the erosion of grand narratives. As discussed in Chapter 1, FPDA has an interest in the free play of multiple voices within a discursive context, which means that the voices of silenced, minority or oppressed groups *need* to be heard. As FPDA has an explicitly feminist focus, it has a role to perform in locating, observing, recording and analysing localised, discursive contexts where silenced or marginalised female voices may be struggling to be heard.

FPDA provides new possibilities not only for understanding how language constructs subject identities and for learning how speech is produced, negotiated and contested within specific social contexts, but also for making sense of the relative powerlessness or 'disadvantage' experienced by silenced groups of girls or women. FPDA does have links and parallels with the approaches of both CA and CDA, but it ultimately produces more complex and possibly more troubling insights into the possibilities for transforming social practices, as I shall now explain.

Where I would suggest that FPDA differs from CDA in particular is in its more complex perception of the ambiguities and unevenness of power. While CDA is more likely to polarise the argument casting males as villains and females as victims, FPDA is more likely to argue that females are multiply located and cannot be so dichotomously cast as powerless, disadvantaged or victims. FPDA accepts that girls/women can and do adopt relatively powerful positions within certain discourses and also acknowledges their agency to resist, challenge and potentially overturn discursive practices that conventionally position them as powerless. In Jones's (1993: 164) call for more educational research to be conducted using a feminist, post-structuralist methodology, she suggests that:

A discursive construction of women and girls as powerful, as producing our own subjectivities within and against the 'spaces' provided is useful in offering more possibilities to develop and use a wider range of practices.

The use of FPDA as an alternative methodology alongside those of CA and CDA also helps to challenge the inertia of 'linguistic orthodoxies' (Billig, 2000: 292), by opening up possibilities for new forms of discourse analysis that 'expose the self-interest and political economy of the sign "critical"".

Multi-disciplinarity

As well-established fields of discourse analysis, both CA and CDA incorporate a diverse range of approaches to examining text and talk. Apart from their use in all areas of linguistics, both approaches are conducted in and combined with other approaches and sub-disciplines, particularly within the humanities and social sciences.

While CA clearly has a distinct methodology, with its own agenda, conceptual framework and specialist terminology, nonetheless it has proved a useful and flexible analytical tool for researchers in a wide range of fields. Its capacity to be transferable to different disciplines or interdisciplinary contexts is precisely because of the focus it places on *methodology* – a systematic analysis of the mechanisms of turn-taking, rather than the conversational content. In support of its transferability to other fields, Schegloff (1999: 561, 563) has argued that, despite CA's claims to 'sociological neutrality', there is no reason why the approach should not be utilised by those researchers in pursuit

of an 'ideological' agenda. In response to Billig's (1999) attack that a 'non-ideological CA' can hardly be deployed to tackle ideological matters such as the indictment of rape or wife-battering, Schegloff (1999: 563) asks:

How else are we to understand their explosive emergence where they happen/if not by examining ordinary interaction with tools appropriate to it, and seeing how they can lead to such outcomes? ... those [researchers] committed to analysing forms of inequality and oppression in interaction might do better to harness [studies of talk-in-interaction] than to complain of it as an ideological distraction.

For CDA, on the other hand, a methodology is always implicated in the social situations it examines. Indeed, van Dijk (2001: 96) has argued that CDA is not a discrete methodology at all ('not a method, nor a theory that can be applied to social problems') but rather a *critical perspective* on social problems. It does not offer (like CA) a ready-made, how-to-do approach to social analysis. He has suggested that for each study a thorough theoretical analysis of the social issue must be made in order to select which discourse and which social structures to examine. This view, that CDA is a critical perspective rather than a methodology, has led proponents such as Wodak (2002) to argue that it has a particular value in multi- and interdisciplinary studies. This is predicated on the view that the growth of complex new problems in a multinational, globalised world requires more than one expertise. According to Wodak, CDA offers a common perspective that can be utilised by 'critical' analysts in an interdisciplinary way – a shared understanding that they must oppose individuals, groups or institutions who abuse text and talk in order to establish, confirm or legitimate their hegemony.

Where does FPDA pitch in to this debate? Until FPDA is better established as an approach to discourse analysis, it will be difficult to judge how useful it will be within and across a range of disciplines. However, its transformative quest – to represent the complexities and ambiguities of female experience, but within this to give space to female voices that are being silenced and peripheralised by masculinised discourses – must link it to a range of interdisciplinary concerns and contexts. Like CA, it offers principles for a systematic methodology, detailed in the next chapter. The two research studies described in this volume (Chapters 4–7) reveal the versatility of the FPDA approach

in its application to two contrasting, institutional settings: the educational context of the classroom and the business context of the boardroom. It is one of the aims of this book to encourage discourse analysts to apply FPDA to a variety of settings where discourses interact with each other to construct unequal power relations within texts or talk, whether domestic, social, public or institutional.

3 Getting to Grips with FPDA

Within the post-structuralist spirit of encouraging interplay between different voices and perspectives, there should never just be *one* version of FPDA, but a whole variety of versions or approaches. Nevertheless, it is the objective of this book to give a clear sense of what constitutes the FPDA approach in order to establish some common ground as a basis for further discussion and developing future practice. In this chapter, I propose a broad set of guidelines for would-be FPDA practitioners, which are explored under the following three headings: principles of FPDA, sources of data and textual analysis.

Principles of FPDA

There are a number of principles constituting the practice of the discourse analyst, which clearly define the FPDA approach but nonetheless overlap with certain aspects of the methodologies associated with CA and CDA. These are: self-reflexivity, a deconstructionist approach and selecting a specific feminist focus.

Self-reflexivity

In Chapter 2, I discussed how different interpretations of the principle of self-reflexivity – or the need to be critical of our assumptions – form an important part of the research practice of CA, CDA and FPDA analysts. Here, I consider three roles for self-reflexivity within the specific context of FPDA research.

First of all, FPDA practitioners should aim to make their theoretical positions clear, and make explicit the epistemological assumptions

that are to be applied to any act of discourse analysis. This is based on the way that both post-structuralist theory (Scott and Usher, 1996) and more recent feminist theory (e.g. Butler, 1990; Lather, 1991; Mills, 2002) have challenged the positivist view that there is a determinate world that can be definitively known and explained (Elliott, 1996; Foucault, 1980; Lyotard, 1984). In contrast, both feminist and post-structuralist theories argue that any interpretation of data must explicitly acknowledge that it is constructed, provisional, perspectival and context-driven. A post-structuralist feminism must therefore accept its own status as context-specific, the product of particular sets of discursive relations. It has no more claim to speak the truth than any other discourse but must own up to its own points of view, specific aims, desires and political positions within power relations. Yet, as I discussed in Chapter 1, post-structuralist theory argues that researchers should only temporarily associate themselves with a particular stance for fear that a 'will to truth' will convert into a 'will to power'. Certainly FPDA practitioners should take care not to engage more than temporarily with any single agenda, in order to encourage a wider and richer interplay of ideas and viewpoints in the discursive arena. This is not to say that FPDA practitioners cannot identify with a feminist perspective or take on a particular cause – quite the opposite. FPDA, in keeping with post-structuralist theory (e.g. Elliott, 1996), *does* have a transformative quest; to represent the complexities and ambiguities of *female* experience, and within this to give space to *female* voices that are being silenced or marginalised by dominant discourses. If and when this specific quest is achieved, FPDA should seek to overturn its own dominant discourse by looking to other 'silenced' issues within the field of gender and discourse or cease to function. This in a sense is its particular declared bias; this is its *raison d'être*. Self-reflexivity is the principle which governs the business of declaring, monitoring and evaluating the FPDA quest, or any other theoretical/epistemological position, while conducting discourse analysis.

Secondly, an approach to FPDA involves being self-reflexive about the deployment of a specialist technical vocabulary or 'foundational rhetoric' (Billig, 1999: 552). This means an explicit awareness that technical terms cannot describe 'objective' realities in an unproblematic way. Of course, post-structuralist theory has anyway collapsed the distinction between a material reality and a language that describes it, preferring to view language or discourses as 'practices that systematically

form the object of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). From a post-structuralist viewpoint, a specialist rhetoric is always associated with a particular knowledge. As this knowledge becomes more defined, accepted and established, its specialist vocabulary becomes a 'technology' by which it can be transformed into a 'truth narrative'. For this reason, FPDA analysts need to be aware that its own 'foundational rhetoric' can operate as a form of arcane, scholastic discrimination, with the potential to exclude and marginalise uninitiated readers and researchers. Ironically but quite justifiably, post-structuralism has itself become a target for jokes and criticisms directed at the obfuscating nature of its jargon. For instance, McWilliam (1997: 201) has criticised what she calls the 'PMT' (post-modernist tension) of certain feminist post-structuralist writers. She cites Lather (1991) as an example of the kind of writer who argues for openness and self-reflexivity, yet seems quite obscure to other readers because of her use of highly verbose styles of writing. Thus, FPDA practitioners must be prepared to call attention to the assumptions and range of definitions implied in their use of key analytic terms. This is also important because all terms have the potential to be multi-accentual, to be read in plural if context-bound ways. This is why I have explained in the Introduction apparently quite obvious terms such as 'feminism', 'post-structuralism', 'discourse', 'power', all of which are open to a wide range of possible readings and interpretations. I would suggest that it is a legitimate authorial practice for FPDA practitioners to 'close down' the range of readings of terms in this way, provided they are self-reflexive in foregrounding the range of meanings that they are potentially invoking or excluding.

Thirdly, FPDA involves the need to be overtly self-aware of the fictionality and textuality of the research process and the phenomenon that any act of research comprises a series of authorial choices and strategies. According to the post-structuralist view, all pursuits of knowledge are to do with creating a world (Usher, 1996), and hence research is itself a discursive construct and constitutive or 'world-making'. Post-structuralism sees any act of knowledge generation, such as discourse analysis, as a 'textualising' practice in that no form of knowledge can be separated from the structures, conventions and conceptuality of language as inscribed within discourses and texts. The business of textualising will constitute the researcher as literally an 'author', with a certain control over their own work of fiction.

However, the researcher is in turn positioned by the limited range of scholastic discursive practices which legitimate particular ways of recording, analysing and interpreting discourse. Few researchers succeed if they work outside approved discursive practices, and this is a truism barely contested by the scholastic conventions adhered to in this book! However, one of the strengths of the FPDA approach is that it encourages researchers to use 'writerly' (Barthes, 1977) strategies in order to foreground the textualising process of conducting discourse analysis. In simpler terms, researchers need to draw attention to the *choices* they make in determining exactly how they are going to analyse texts, and then be prepared to justify or explain the effects of those choices. Arguably, the FPDA approach to self-reflexivity adds to and enriches other forms of analysis, such as CA and CDA, by the particular focus it places on the authorial role of the analyst and the 'fictionality' or constructed nature of all acts of research.

A deconstructionist approach

In this section, I describe what a deconstructionist approach to the analysis of discourse implies, with its special emphasis on *textual interplay*. Central to *both* a feminist *and* a post-structuralist analysis is the drive to question things, to deconstruct the constructions and structures around us, not in the nihilistic or relativist sense sometimes stereotypically associated with deconstructionism (e.g. Linstead, 1993; Norris, 1990), but in order to release the possibility of fresh juxtapositions and interplay among established and new ideas. This can then become the basis for new insights and small-scale transformative actions. A deconstructionist approach to discourse analysis might combine some or all of the following elements, which are explored more fully below:

- Acknowledgement that the factual is replaced by the representational: that is, that there is no out-there reality that requires sophisticated analytic tools to uncover and predict
- A recognition that the meaning of speech, concepts, people, relationships and so on, can never be fixed permanently, and is therefore endlessly deferred
- An understanding that process is primary to structure (that is, process produces structure, not the other way round)

- The quest against the privileging of something over another, for example, one voice over another (unless in the service of some immediate, localised or short-term cause)
- Avoidance of conceptual closure, or ultimately fixable frames of reference through the continual application of reflexivity, or the need to be critical of our intellectual assumptions
- The existence of a continual *textual interplay* or 'double movement' between concepts so that opposites merge in a constantly undecidable exchange of attributes
- An understanding of the necessary *supplementarity* of meanings in the relationship of opposite terms (for example the terms 'male' and 'female' should be seen as both separately necessary and yet simultaneously interconnecting with and challenging the identity of the other).

The principle of textual interplay derives from Derrida's deconstructive principle of *différance*. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Derrida (e.g. 1976, 1978, 1982) uses the special term '*différance*' to suggest, at the same time, the impossibility of closing off the differing aspects of meaning and the perpetual postponement or *deferral* of meaning. Derrida therefore sees '*différance*' as a force of *continuous absence*; that is, where the meaning of something cannot be attained without a continuing recognition of the meaning it defers. He argues that the '*movement of différance*' undermines our desire or need to achieve a coherent and singular meaning in a given concept. Hence, the greater the attempt to fix meaning permanently through, for example, the traditional research principles of reliability and validity, the greater the potential for '*slippage*' as meaning can only ever be fixed temporarily, located as it is within different discursive contexts. Thus, the effect of any textual representation in which meaning is apparently fixed, such as a work of discourse analysis, is just a temporary and elusive retrospective fixing, always open to challenge and redefinition. In a broader context, the post-structuralist project has sought to challenge and upset all forms of research inquiry that attempts to *fix* meaning permanently as knowledge or, ultimately, as 'truth narratives'.

The hallmark of a deconstructionist analysis is to question the modernist assumption that language is organised in terms of oppositions, each term depending on and being supported by the other in order to signify or *mean*. Such terms of opposition (e.g. male/female;

public/private; subjective/objective) exist or are often treated by modernist analysts as though they exist in a hierarchy, a dualism, a relationship of power, with one term at any moment predominant over the other. However, the social philosopher Cooper (1989) has argued that one term in any pair of oppositions always inhabits and interpenetrates the other term, producing a *supplementarity* of both/and, – or a kind of 'double movement' between the two. In most forms of research inquiry, modernism pursues the opposition of terms, placing one over or against the other, whereas post-structuralism resists the closure of terms, actively exploring the interconnection or '*supplementarity*' of the one with the other.

Cooper (1989: 483) proposes two interrelated deconstructive '*movements*' or (in my terms) strategies that might be usefully deployed by FPDA practitioners. The first is that of *overturning*, which focuses on the binary oppositions of terms (subject positions or discourses) and challenges the place of the suppressed term. This, I would suggest, is the approach used in CDA, according to its stated mission that terms associated with the '*oppressed*' must be treated as superior to terms marginalising the central remains an oppositional strategy and itself creates another hierarchy which in turn requires overturning. The hallmark of deconstruction is the second strategy: that of *metaphorisation*, which attempts to go beyond hierarchies of oppositions and sustain the perpetual double movement within the opposition. Metaphorisation recognises that the positively valued term is defined only by contrast with the negatively valued term, and that each inhabit, co-exist and co-evolve with the other. A deconstructionist approach would advocate the need to juggle with sets of oppositions and supplementarities, always keeping one's options open in order to keep a richer, more nuanced range of ideas in play. It is this subtle process of *textual interplay* with apparently opposing or, perhaps, competing terms and sets of ideas which has distinguished the deconstructionist approach from modernist versions of discourse analysis.

But what does all this mean in terms of conducting a feminist post-structuralist approach to discourse analysis? How can we avoid the oft-made criticism (e.g. Linstead, 1993: 109) against deconstructive approaches that 'the idea of a free play of signifiers as a pretext for endless interpretative games without the necessity to pay regard to standards of logic or ideas of truth' makes any analysis from this

perspective pointless if not worthless? This charge will be partly addressed in the next section of this chapter when I consider the *feminist* focus upon post-structuralist discourse analysis, and will be specifically addressed by considering the range of strategies below.

I would therefore suggest that there are various strategies by which FPDA practitioners can develop an organised and focused approach to their work whilst simultaneously acknowledging the continual textual interplay of the data arising from their research, *without* being swallowed up by deconstructionist relativism. The *first* is by consciously not developing an overriding authorial argument at the expense of alternative points of view. Those 'alternative points of view' might be represented by the voices of other theorists in the field, the participants in the research study, and/or by different members of a research team in conducting the business of analysing texts. Partly implicated in this is the principle of self-reflexivity: the author/analyst must own up to his/her ideological motives, perspectives and shortcomings within a given discursive context. But additionally there is the post-structuralist recognition of a kind of intellectual pluralism that the author/analyst has no more claim to speak 'the truth' and no better right to be heard than any other participant in the study. The purpose of supplementing the analyst's voice with the voices of other participants is different to its role in more traditional ethnographic terms (e.g. Hammersley, 1990: 606) where the cross-validation of multiple accounts are added to produce 'one true description'. Instead, FPDA's purpose is to pre-empt the imperialism of the author's voice and bring a richer, potentially more imaginative range of ideas and viewpoints into play. In other words, the author/analyst should allow their own voice to be supplemented by voices from a variety of data sources, so that they do not privilege their own readings at the expense of those who may have contributed to, or constituted the data.

Secondly, aiming for textual interplay as a discourse analyst also means resisting the temptation to go for narrative closure, and allowing space for an open-ended verdict, or for alternative voices to comment on the data. From a deconstructive perspective, this inhibits the possibility of ossification or degradation into hierarchical structure, and opens up the recognition of the subtle, continuous shifts between terms, ideas and perspectives. The job of the FPDA analyst is effectively like that of a juggler who is striving to keep all the batons in the air simultaneously. However, this particular analogy not only implies

multiple accounts (the batons) but also an author (the juggler). In self-reflexive spirit, I must therefore acknowledge that the post-structuralist advocacy of open-ended, endlessly deferred meaning goes against the grain for most researchers, trained as they are in the business of having something significant to say from which others might learn. My answer to this is that within an FPDA framework we should attempt to do both: provide opportunities for multiple, open-ended readings of a piece of analysis, but self-reflexively juxtapose our own supplementary accounts alongside those of other participants. Thirdly, we should be self-reflexively open to the incipient irony of what we say and do as authors and analysts: this book represents an attempt to fix meaning, however much it purports to be in the business of destabilising the meanings generated by 'authoritative discourses' (Bakhtin, 1981). Finally, despite the emphasis upon textual interplay and juggling on the part of the analyst, the methodology of FPDA involves a strictly pragmatic, focused, logical and organised process, as I shall demonstrate in the following chapters. This is because FPDA scholarship very much resides in systematically highlighting the diverse voices constituting the data from the cacophony of any research setting. It would be counter-intuitive and frankly daft to expect discourse analysts or their readers to accept a kind of fuzzy, ever-questioning interpretation of spoken discourse where things have no pin-downable meanings.

Finding a feminist focus

In Chapter 1, I explored how 'third wave' or post-structuralist feminism works to defuse and dissolve the oppositions and tensions, which inscribed the emancipatory agenda of modernist feminism. I argued that current versions of feminism are in many ways compatible with, and supplement post-structuralist theory. For example, post-structuralist feminism has been concerned to critique many of the fundamental tenets of 'second wave' feminism, challenging constructs of gender dichotomy (e.g. Bing and Bergvall, 1998) and supplementing them with constructs of diversity and complexity. While it would be wrong to ignore or smooth away the potential contradictions between post-structuralism's advocacy of textual interplay on one hand, and feminism's commitment to privileging the female voice on the other, I have suggested that there is space for a partnership between the two perspectives since both support

the quest to release the voices of those who have been silenced or suppressed.

As Mills (2002) has argued, feminist research is no longer about exploring the effects of the 'big' sociolinguistic variable of gender on different social groups in a top-down, all-embracing way, nor is it about demonstrating that girls/women are universally subordinated or oppressed. Within a post-structuralist paradigm, a feminist focus is, among other things, 'a form of attention, a lens that brings into focus particular questions' (Fox-Keller, 1985: 6). It is concerned with feminist questions and issues that might arise in the study of specific communities of speakers, and is therefore ideally suited to small-scale, localised, short-term, strategically planned projects which intend to transform some aspects of cultural practice for girls/women. This focus may be preconceived and therefore self-reflexively imposed on the analysis of the data. For example, I applied a preconceived focus to the management study (Chapters 6 and 7) where I chose to study the ways in which one female senior manager negotiated her competing subject positions within the context of a series of male-dominated business meetings. Alternatively, in ethnographic spirit, the feminist focus might arise 'naturally' from extended observations within a research setting. This occurred in the classroom study (Chapters 4 and 5) where I gradually became aware that a dominant discourse of gender differentiation was interwoven with other discourses to position girls as generally more silent than boys in public classroom settings such as whole class discussion.

Thus, selecting a feminist focus to post-structuralist discourse analysis must inevitably move away from the old issues of the oppression and subordination of women, or the effects of gender upon the speech patterns of particular social groups. It involves highlighting key discourses on gender as they are negotiated and performed within specific, localised contexts. It also involves making sense of the ways in which these discourses position female speakers (in particular) as relatively powerful, powerless or a combination of both. It acknowledges the complexities, ambiguities and differences in the experiences of particular female speakers, as well as focusing on the possibilities for resistance and reinterpretation of social practices. It celebrates and foregrounds moments of *strength* in women's interactions with others, whilst self-reflexively pointing up the dangers of becoming complacent about privileging certain (female) voices over those of others.

Sources of data

A powerful source of data for the FPDA practitioner, apart from transcripts of talk or written texts, is that which is gained from a range of different voices: whether those of the research subjects themselves, other members of the research team, theorists in the field or, indeed, the author's own voice. This section explores two interrelated constructs: *polyphony* or multiple-voices, and *heteroglossia* or competing voices and accounts.

Polyphony

We can gain a richer understanding of the concept of 'multiple-voices' for the purposes of discourse analysis by exploring the relevance of the ideas of the Russian formalist Bakhtin (1981) on both polyphony and heteroglossia.

Polyphony involves providing space in an analysis for the co-existence and juxtaposition of a plurality of voices and accounts that do not necessarily fuse into a single authorial account. Bakhtin's music-derived trope of polyphony was originally conceptualised in reference to the complex play of ideological voices in the work of the Russian novelist Dostoevsky. Polyphony refers to the co-existence, in any textual or discursive context, of a plurality of voices which do not fuse into a single consciousness, but rather exist on different registers, generating a 'dialogical' or intertextual dynamism among themselves. According to Bakhtin, this intertextual dynamism doesn't lead to 'mere heterogeneity' but offers an interplay of voices which are juxtaposed and counterposed in order to generate something 'beyond themselves'. For Bakhtin (1981: 60), each cultural voice exists in dialogue with other voices so that 'utterances are not indifferent to one another and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect each other'. According to this view, social or *discursive* diversity is fundamental to every utterance, even to those utterances which on the surface ignore or exclude other, related voices. This Bakhtinian conceptualisation of multiple utterances or viewpoints is therefore very much in tune with Cooper's (1989) movement of metaphorisation (see above), in which the juxtaposition of dissonant and sometimes contradictory viewpoints brings about a transformative interdependence between them. From an FPDA perspective, this suggests to the researcher the need to investigate

a richer, more complex set of possible understandings and readings of the data.

Getting practical, how can the FPDA practitioner achieve a polyphonic approach to the data? Here are three possibilities. First, an analysis can aim to produce multiple perspectives upon a single, centralised event, text or textual extract. In the classroom study (Chapters 4 and 5), I selected just one speech event for the purposes of my analysis – a whole class discussion – from many similar events I had observed and recorded as part of a longer term, ethnographic approach to the data. The selection and foregrounding of this particular discussion was partly fortuitous: it was to be used by the school's English department as a focus for formal coursework assessment, followed by a staff moderation meeting. This offered me the potential for a plurality of voices and perspectives, those of the students in the class, the class teacher, the staff moderating the activity and my own observations. I added the researcher's dimension of a video-recorder in order to capture the non-verbal as well as the verbal interactions of the discussion. Having video-recorded and transcribed the discussion, I showed the video-tape to different groups of participants – the students themselves, the class teacher and the teachers at the moderation meeting – and afterwards tape-recorded their reactions and responses. In the final analysis of the whole class discussion, I attempted to juxtapose the plural and often competing accounts of these different groups of participants alongside my own. Readers will no doubt judge how successful I have been in living up to this principle. But I am more than aware that, however self-reflexive the researcher, it is difficult to resist academic convention and move away from the 'single authoritative account' (Bakhtin, 1981) which, despite all good intentions, does indeed dominate this analysis.

The other suggestions for incorporating polyphony within discourse analysis are more speculative and are suggested as possibilities for future development of the FPDA approach. Thus, my *second* suggestion is where *one* author might produce *multiple* and perhaps competing versions of the same act of discourse analysis, so in a sense there would be no 'original' or authorised version. Similar experimental work has of course been carried out within the broader fields of critical or feminist ethnography (e.g. Skeggs, 1994). Famously, Margery Wolf (1992), the feminist ethnographer, has produced three different narratives of her ethnography in Taiwan. Deploying different frameworks, rhetorical

strategies and authorising claims, she exposes the different ways in which her ethnography can be told.

The *third* approach is to make available an initial draft of a given work of discourse analysis available to the subjects within a research study for their feedback, responses and critique. The final draft would be multi-authored to the extent that it aims to juxtapose the researcher's analysis alongside these supplementary accounts. An alternative version might be where a team of discourse analysts are examining a particular phenomenon such as gendered discourse in the classroom. Rather than the modernist approach of a collaborative analysis being produced as a unified, holistic text, multiple readings of the same speech event might be created *simultaneously* by different participants and then juxtaposed with each other like a collage. Either of these two versions would produce a rather different outcome than, for example, collaborative but ultimately monologic analysis. Whereas the single or co-authored account usually aims to produce a clear, unequivocal message and at times an emancipatory action, a polyphonic analysis hopes to disrupt the possibility of neatly packaged solutions, instead provoking unusual combinations of ideas and more thought-provoking if more disruptive insights, which of course can lead to (transformative) action.

While all these approaches are necessarily time-intensive and space-consuming, they have the advantage of producing a multi-faceted discourse analysis of considerable complexity, insight and depth. Furthermore, a polyphonic approach helps to reveal the gaps, ambiguities and contradictions within and between different accounts that are often ignored, masked or glossed over by the single-authored, monologic analysis.

Heteroglossia

An additional source of data for the FPDA analyst is that of differently orientated voices and accounts or, in Bakhtin's (1981) term, 'heteroglossia'. This is the act of making visible the non-official viewpoint, the marginalised, the silenced and the oppressed from other, more dominant viewpoints. Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia is useful to FPDA because it differentiates the profoundly relational view of post-structuralist theory from its parodic stereotype as an endless free-play of signifiers without reference points. Critics of post-structuralist theory such as Norris (1990: 138–9) have argued that the polyphonic

approach appears to deny all standards of interpretative consistency, resulting in 'a kind of pluralist tolerance which leaves no room for significant disagreement on issues of principle or practice'. The concept of heteroglossia provides the FPDA practitioner with a reference point from which to view the world, while recognising that the discursive location of such reference points may be fixed only temporarily.

Bakhtin's (1981) views on heteroglossia have been aligned with the Marxist emancipatory agenda to show:

The cultural viewpoint of the oppressed, their 'hidden' knowledges and resistances as well as the basis on which their entrapping 'decisions' are taken in some sense of liberty, but which nevertheless help to produce 'structure'. (Willis, 1977: 146).

Bakhtin's specific contribution to post-structuralist thinking, however, was to foreground not the political or economic, but the *linguistic* dimension of social struggle: the ways in which all utterance and discourse are subject to the deforming and transforming struggle for power. In his concept of heteroglossia, Bakhtin locates ideological struggle at the centre of all discourse, whether in the form of political rhetoric, artistic practice or everyday interaction. He suggests that every apparently unified linguistic or social community is characterised by heteroglossia, whereby language becomes the space of confrontation between differently orientated voices, as diverse social groups fight it out on the terrain of language. According to his theory, while the dominant discourse strives to make a given sign, such as 'woman', uni-accentual and endowed with an eternal, reified character, resistant discourses rise up to challenge and disrupt conventional understandings offering multi-accentual readings. In post-structuralist terms, heteroglossia describes the struggle for the control of signifiers such as 'woman', and the process by which discourses compete to fix meaning permanently and irrevocably on behalf of hegemonic interests.

While a Bakhtinian perspective on heteroglossia finds its reference points in committing to an ideological agenda which makes space for the voices and concerns of 'the oppressed', a feminist post-structuralist viewpoint seeks two related reference points. The first is its commitment to spotlight and focus upon (especially) female voices and accounts of participants in a research study who may be relatively *silent* compared to their more vociferous male or possibly female counterparts;

or indeed to make space for voices which show evidence of having been repeatedly *silenced* by others. As an aside, it is worth noting that FPDA would take account of at least two different levels of interpreting the 'silencing' of women, according to feminist linguistics. On a literal level, it is the interpersonal tendency of men to 'silence' women by tactics of interruption, talking over, heckling and so on (e.g. Fishman, 1980; Zimmerman and West, 1975). On a theoretical level, it may refer to the 'dominance' view (e.g. Olsen, 1978; Spender, 1980) of an excluding, 'man-made' language which has constructed females as the 'othered' or 'silenced' sex. An FPDA approach would aim to identify where competing discourses in a given setting seem to lead (temporarily) to more fixed patterns of dominant and subordinated subject positions. Such an analysis would be conducted in the spirit of 'supplementarity' (Derrida, 1976: 27-30) or richer textual play, according to which no single voice is suppressed, displaced by or privileged over any other, but rather, each voice is allowed the space to complement, enhance and, at the same time, undercut or disrupt other voices.

FPDA's second reference point is its quest to challenge any simple dualism between dominant discourses representing the voices of oppressors, and oppositional discourses constituting the voices of the oppressed. It aims to reveal the complexities of participants' interactions, foregrounding the ways in which positions of power are continuously negotiated, contested and subverted, never permanently settling as 'structure'. For example, the FPDA practitioner must embrace the possibility that *male* as well as female speakers are frequently marginalised in such contexts as a board meeting or a whole class discussion, as a consequence of the relative powerfulness of competing institutional discourses other than gender differentiation operating in those settings. Such an analysis must be prepared to take account of the complexity of many mixed-sex spoken interactions. For example, a male business manager may appear to be adopting a quite dominant subject position as a speaker at a board meeting but, is being simultaneously challenged by his colleagues. Or a female manager in the same context routinely comes across as a dominant and influential speaker yet is positioned quite differently from her male counterparts by a discourse of gender differentiation (Chapters 6 and 7).

So, what are the strategies open to the FPDA practitioner for promoting a heteroglossic analysis of the data? The first, most obvious strategy is literally to give a voice to those research participants who appear

to be either silent or silenced: the silent girl at the side of the classroom who rarely speaks; or the articulate female manager in the board meeting who appears to have difficulty in sustaining her authority. In my classroom study (Chapters 4 and 5), I gave prominence to both the silent and the silenced. In terms of the more *silent* students, both female and male, I acted as a kind of facilitator or enabler when I interviewed them in groups so that they could have protected access to the floor and develop their views. A better approach, although I did not do this, might have been to have interviewed these students *individually* as well as in groups. (However, my own experience of working with more reserved young people has shown that the one-to-one interview can be a double-edged sword: while some regard it as a welcome opportunity to talk more freely, others read it as a welcome intrusion from yet another figure of adult authority.) In terms of the *silenced* students, part of my analysis was directed towards ascertaining how and why certain patterns of silence are being actively constructed in the context of oral activities such as whole class discussions. In presenting my analysis, I aimed simultaneously to give space to the competing voices of the participants – juxtaposing the heterogeneous and often conflicting perspectives of the students, the class teacher and the assessors – but yet to give special prominence to those female speakers whose viewpoints might easily have been overlooked or marginalised. This is indeed the core principle of FPDA.

However, the act of silence or silencing should not be read unaccentually always as a form of marginalisation or submission. It can also constitute a powerful means of *resistance*, in that being silent can sometimes be self-affirming rather than undermining. In Alyson Jule's (2002) study of Amandeep, simultaneously a silent and silenced ten-year-old Sikh girl in the context of a Canadian English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, the author gives prominence in her discourse analysis to the limited number of speech encounters she observed over a period of two years. We see exactly how Amandeep is constructed as a silent student and how as a consequence she partly *becomes* her construction. But this is not the whole story – her silence becomes a secret weapon in resisting the expectations of her teacher to become a 'good' student and hence a good Canadian citizen. According to Jule, she is refusing to play an active part in the colonising practices of this ESL classroom, which silences, marginalises and threatens to undermine her Sikh cultural identity.

Finally, a word of caution for researchers intending to adopt a 'heteroglossic' approach to the analysis; it is obviously important to be highly self-reflexive about the authoritative researcher position. An analyst must exercise a considerable degree of scrutiny about what constitutes a silent or silenced research subject within a particular location; *who* decides the identity of the silent or the silenced; and upon the basis of *what* evidence. FPDA practitioners must therefore aim to make quite explicit the possible gaps, ambiguities and contradictions in their data on the basis of which they may choose to constitute and represent certain subjects as silent or silenced, and others as doing the silencing.

Textual analysis

The synchronic–diachronic dimension

These terms, borrowed from Halliday's (1989) functional model of language, are used to convey the way in which an FPDA practitioner should ideally adopt two supplementary approaches to textual analysis, which I shall now consider in turn. The first is a *synchronic* approach: that is, a detailed, micro-analysis of short stretches of spoken discourse such as a whole class discussion in a school, or a business management meeting. Indeed, it is this synchronic approach that is especially associated with the approaches of CA and more recently CDA, as I discussed in Chapter 2.

The synchronic approach is of particular relevance to FPDA because of the imperative to capture a moment or sequence of moments when discursive power shifts occur. One of the tenets of FPDA is that speakers are never uniformly powerful or powerless, only temporarily constituted in the same ways by the same discourses within given locations. This is not to say that certain configurations of discursive positioning can and do recur, nor that certain individuals and social groups may be more systematically positioned as powerful or powerless. Nevertheless, where there *are* instances of 'degradation and ossification into structure' (Linthead, 1993: 112), these are always subject to the possibility of resistance by the subject positions offered by competing discourses. Thus the value of synchronic discourse analysis is that it can identify and demonstrate the exact moment or sequence of moments when speakers experience a shift between

positions of relative powerfulness and powerlessness. It can show from the analysis of a series of moments that speakers are constantly negotiating for positions of power according to their shifting subject positions within different discourses. It can potentially show why one speaker is likely to be constructed more routinely as powerful and another more consistently as powerless by their responses within a given moment. The next section (Denotation-connotation) discusses how such micro-analyses of moments where discursive power shifts occur might be carried out.

The *diachronic* or geneological perspective supplements that of the synchronic by analysing more ethnographically the language of individuals, groups or communities of practice over a period of time. This involves recording configurations, developments and changes in the discursive relationships of individuals or groups for the purposes of discourse analysis. This would not be done in the more traditional sociolinguistic sense in order to record trends, patterns or variations in speech and behaviour according to a variable such as gender. Rather the FPDA approach to long-term observation would be to notice and interrogate the ways in which certain speakers may be more consistently positioned as powerful or powerless, whereas others are subject to more shifting power relations. Such an analysis would be able, for example, to paint a more subtle and complex picture of the differences *within* and *between* girls/women in terms of the ways in which they variously negotiate their positions within competing discourses. It would be able to capture individual moments of resistance and empowerment in the spoken interactions of girls/women who might otherwise be constituted as victims. It would, in short, allow for the possibility of analysing moments where *change occurs* in the form of challenges, contestations, power reversals, perhaps subtle or more direct revisions of the status quo.

The examples of FPDA that I demonstrate in this book constitute 'work in progress'. I do not consider that the studies in this book demonstrate a fully evolved approach to diachronic analysis. Owing to difficulties of access, the management study (Chapters 6 and 7) is largely a synchronic micro-analysis, conducted in a relatively short period of time and failing to track the developments or changes in the discursive relationships of this group of managers. The classroom study (Chapters 4 and 5) also synchronically focuses upon a single speech event, although it does draw upon observations, competing

accounts and contradictory experiences from the larger ethnographic study. Future FPDA practitioners might explore beyond the limits of my own version by seeking ways to complement or juxtapose a synchronic analysis with a more diachronic approach. One suggestion is that such an analysis might capture the spoken interactions of a group (such as a class of students), over several separate occasions within a period of time which has significance for them (say, an academic year). This might be supplemented by a comparative analysis highlighting shifts, changes and transformations in the discursive practices of individuals or groups.

Denotation-connotation

Borrowed from the work of the semiologist Barthes (e.g. 1973, 1977) and his followers, this pair of interrelated terms is useful to FPDA because it offers the possibility of an analysis on two discrete but interconnected levels.

The *denotative* level of analysis aims to give a concrete description of what is going on within a text, such as an extract of spoken discourse, by making close and detailed reference to the verbal and non-verbal interactions of the participants. The value of this is that it provides a linguistic analysis of a speech encounter which attends to the obvious, common-sense meanings within any interaction, and therefore forms an apparently uncontroversial basis from which a theoretically driven interpretation can emerge. Here the methods of CA, such as its attention to the turn-taking sequence of participants, may be a useful tool for FPDA practitioners in helping to produce a denotative description of what is going on. Analysts from different fields and with varying theoretical persuasions have adapted the methods of CA in order to produce detailed accounts of gendered discourse. For example, in the field of language and gender, theorists have used CA to produce closely grained descriptions of the ways in which specific linguistic features, such as minimal responses (e.g. Fishman, 1980), interruptions and overlaps (e.g. Zimmerman and West, 1975), directives (e.g. Goodwin, 1990) and tag questions (e.g. Holmes, 1992), are negotiated through a series of turns in single-sex or mixed-sex conversations. (See Appendix I for definitions of specialist linguistic terms used in the denotative analysis.)

However, the FPDA practitioner needs to be aware, as a proviso, that however denotative a 'description' aims to be, it is always a culturally

specific form of interpretation involving at the very least the selection of a focus, the highlighting of key aspects for attention and the consequent marginalisation of other aspects. Also, many words used to offer a description are 'loaded' words, that is, imbued with the interpretation of the analyst. If the same task of producing a description of a given transcript was asked of ten CA analysts, it goes without saying that each would produce a different reading while retaining certain principles and approaches in common. Indeed, I have already discussed how, within a feminist post-structuralist framework, the implicitly value-laden and interpretative function of any form of analysis is to be welcomed rather than disguised as pseudo-objective. The value of description at the denotative level is that it can offer a preliminary order of quite concrete interpretation which can be readily shared with research participants and theorists alike, but which provides a springboard for more searching and heteroglossic analysis.

The *connotative* level of analysis aims to provide this more searching, interpretative commentary of extracts of spoken discourse, drawing partly from the synchronic, denotative evidence above, and partly from ethnographic or diachronic sources of data. FPDA requires that analysts actively seek to identify institutional or social discourses that appear to be operating in the research setting. This is rarely produced by observing or recording one particular speech event, but is more likely to be achieved by conducting ethnographic observation of a particular social group or community of practice over a period of time. This very much describes the methodology I used in the classroom study on students' assessed talk (Chapters 4 and 5), where I had not initially intended to analyse the data from an FPDA perspective. It was only through extended observation, note-taking and video-recording that I gradually became aware of particular sets of expectations and assumptions that were routinely and consistently at work within the context of this classroom. These often competing sets of assumptions seemed to signify a complex interplay of discourses. These in turn appeared to have a powerful effect in constituting the assessed talk of this class of students. In order that these 'discourses' are *not* perceived as subjective impressions but as 'a materialism of the incorporeal' (Foucault, 1972), it is vital that analysts keep systematic records on how, when and where these discourses occur within a range of contexts. In my own case, I used the following sources of evidence:

- non-verbal language of the participants, such as eye contact, gestures, seating positions
- verbal language, such as constantly repeated keywords and phrases, or regularly used linguistic features by the participants
- metalanguage: the language used by participants in interviews to describe their speech, behaviour and relationships.

By way of illustration, I will give one brief example of how I applied this approach to the classroom study. I identified a discourse of *gender differentiation* at work first of all by carefully noting patterns of non-verbal interaction. For instance, I recorded how girls conformed to classroom rules by putting their hands up in the classroom more often than boys, yet boys were granted far more turns to speak. Secondly, in terms of keywords and phrases, I noted how girls regularly *agreed* with points that boys had made in a discussion by saying, 'I agree with Joe that...', whereas there were *no* instances of a boy naming a girl in this way. Thirdly, in terms of metalanguage, I noted how both boys and girls spontaneously referred to gender difference as a means of generalising about speech and behaviour in the classroom (e.g. 'Girls tend to put their hands up more.'). From these three sources, I was able to gather a body of evidence to suggest that gender differentiation was one of a number of powerful discourses constructing students' talk in this classroom. More detail on exactly *how* different discourses were identified for the purposes of textual analysis is given in the case study chapters.

To sum up, a connotative analysis is concerned to demonstrate how speakers are continuously positioned or repositioned by a range of competing discourses pertaining to a given social/institutional context. It seeks to show how speakers are constantly negotiating for positions of power or resisting positions of powerlessness according to the range of subject positions made available to them. In so doing, the commentary does not simply rely upon the 'authoritative discourse' (Bakhtin, 1981) of the analyst in order to make meaning from the data. It aims to weave together the 'internally persuasive discourses' (Bakhtin, 1981; Skidmore, 1999) or 'supplementary' (Derrida, 1976) accounts of the research participants collected at different stages of the study, in order to represent the multiple, diverse and often dissonant perspectives of the particular case.

Intertextuality

Noting the workings of intertextuality within spoken discourse is an essential part of the craft of FPDA. This involves foregrounding and highlighting the ways in which dominant discourses within any speech context are always inflected and inscribed with traces of other discourses.

Associated with the work of early post-structuralists such as Barthes (1977) and Kristeva (1984), intertextuality applies simultaneously to everyday speech, popular culture and the literary and artistic tradition. In the broadest sense, intertextuality refers to the open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances in which a text is located. To this extent, it can be argued that there are no beginnings and ends between texts, just a boundless fluidity. Eagleton (1983: 138), writing specifically about literary criticism, suggests that utterances reach texts through a quite subtle process of dissemination:

All literary texts are woven out of other literary texts, not in the conventional sense that they bear the traces of influence, but in the more radical sense that every word, phrase or segment is a reworking of other writings which precede or surround the individual work. There is no such thing as literary originality, no such thing as the 'first' literary work: all work is intertextual.

According to Barthes (1977: 23), intertextuality is not so much a style but a structural property which allows readers to read and texts to be produced. A text only gathers meaning because it is 'woven entirely with citations, references, echoes and cultural languages' and is 'caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts and other sentences'. It is thus both inscribed with the traces of the texts that have gone before it, and formed in the act of reading by the inexhaustible databank of references we all carry with us as participants in a culture.

If this principle is transferred to FPDA, it is possible to analyse the range of discourses shaping spoken interaction within any given context as operating not in a discrete way but always intertextually. For instance, in the classroom study (see Chapters 4 and 5), three key discourses are identified as constituting the talk in this setting: those of gender differentiation; peer and teacher approval; and a model of collaborative talk in English teaching. While it is possible to identify

and categorise each as a separate discourse often in competition with the others, they simultaneously appeared to work in intertextualised ways to produce a range of subject positions for this class of students. For example, a discourse of gender differentiation was seen to be interwoven with a discourse of collaborative or 'approved' talk in English, in that girls were expected to be more collaborative than boys. There were clear sets of gendered expectations that girls should listen quietly during a class discussion and conform to the principle of 'hands up', whereas boys could get away with interrupting others and 'chipping in'. FPDA would aim to show how such intertextualisation of discourses may lead to more systematic patterns of gender differentiation, which are then assimilated into the routine practices of the classroom and whole school. However, FPDA would also be concerned to point up instances of the complexities of subject positioning produced by the intertextualised nature of discourses, which provide gaps for agency and resistance, especially among girls.

The principle of intertextuality can be applied not only to the transcripts of spoken discourse within a corpus of data, but also to the polyphonic, supplementary accounts contained in interview data, observation notes, video-recordings and so on. In the next four chapters, I demonstrate how the FPDA practitioner can draw upon the framework of principles discussed in this chapter in order to produce a complex and penetrating analysis of the ways in which intertextualised and often competing discourses constitute all spoken interactions.

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