

## Abstract

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Poststructuralist Discourse Studies: from structure to practice

Poststructuralism has brought social, cultural and political theories into a productive exchange with methods and tools for analysing text and talk. My contribution outlines the contours of Poststructuralist Discourse Studies (PDS), which is an interdisciplinary field of discourse research inspired by poststructuralism. It gives an overview of poststructuralism, trace its evolution and identify its key questions. I then spell out the consequences of poststructuralism for Discourse Studies, where it has given birth to the new field of PDS. PDS critically relates to the structuralist, top-down tendencies, which have characterized some of the pioneering 'French School' and 'Critical' strands in Discourse Studies. It defends post-humanist and anti-essentialist views on power and knowledge. Perceiving language as a socially constitutive practice, it places emphasis on the critical and reflexive dimensions of discourse research. Situated at the interdisciplinary intersection of language and society, PDS aims to bridge structure- and practice-oriented strands of discourse research and to overcome the divisions between linguistics and other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities.

Keywords: discourse, social practice, poststructuralism, reality as social construction, French School, critical approaches, representation, agency, reflexivity

## 1. Introduction

'Poststructuralism' designates theoretical and political debates in the social sciences and humanities which have crucially contributed to the growing interdisciplinary interest in the problem of discourse since the 1970s. Poststructuralism is typically associated with intellectuals from France and theorists from the Anglo-American world who are in dialogue with 'Continental' traditions. As proponents of a linguistic turn in social, cultural and political theory, these theorists defend post-humanist and anti-essentialist epistemologies against the background of a crisis of political and aesthetic representation. Poststructuralism has put 'discourse' centre stage in the interdisciplinary theoretical discourse of the social sciences and humanities. Yet in Discourse Studies, where there is a division between linguistics and other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, the label 'poststructuralism' is still a controversial one. Earlier 'Critical' and 'French School' discourse researchers are indebted to structuralist conceptions of language and society, which are challenged by poststructuralism.

## 2. Overview

In this contribution, I will give an account of Poststructuralist Discourse Studies (PDS), which is an umbrella term for various interdisciplinary strands studying the social production of meaning. PDS turns around the nexus of power, language and subjectivity while reflexively accounting for the critical effects of discourse research on society. In 3.1, I will discuss the term 'poststructuralism', map the controversies around 'poststructuralism' and spell out its consequences for Discourse Studies. In 3.2., I will discuss earlier tendencies in 'French School' as well as Critical Discourse Studies. With its critique of closed container structures and of the centered subject, PDS questions lingering structuralist conceptions of language and/or society in Discourse Studies (3.3). In the future (4.), one may expect a more systematic exchange over key problems in PDS across disciplinary fields, notably between linguistics and the other social sciences as well as between Anglophone and Francophone traditions. Key problems turn around a perceived 'methodological deficit' as well as the stance that PDS takes toward the critique of power.

## 3. Issues and ongoing debates

### 3.1. A brief account of 'poststructuralism'

Poststructuralism is a theoretical debate that crosses the disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. It exists at the intersection of three disciplinary clusters: a) the humanities, where poststructuralism deals with the dilemmas of political and aesthetic representation (Spivak 1988), b) the social sciences, where the question is how social order is constituted in discursive practices, and c) the interdisciplinary space of language and society, which revolves around the uses of language in context.

One can distinguish between a narrow understanding, which equates 'poststructuralism' with a short-lived fashion in literary theory around 1980 (especially deconstructivism), and a wider understanding as the interdisciplinary theoretical debate about subjectivity, language and power since the late 1960s that has involved theorists and activists in the intellectual arena that once had been founded by Marxism and psychoanalysis. It is in the latter sense that I will discuss the contributions of poststructuralism to Discourse Studies (cf. Benoît 2017).

Even though 'poststructuralism' is associated with canonical theorists from France (and some other 'Continental' thinkers), it has never had currency in France (Angermuller 2015). Poststructuralism has resulted from the way these theorists have been received internationally, notably in the Anglophone

world. The prefix ‘post’ does not necessarily mean that poststructuralism is ‘anti-structuralist’. In fact, many poststructuralists share the relational methodology and the anti-essentialist thrust of structuralism. Nor is poststructuralism necessarily related to postmodernity (i.e. post-Enlightenment political theory) and postmodernism (i.e. new aesthetic tendencies since the late 1960s). If Marxist cultural theorists such as Jameson (1991) have theorised poststructuralism as the theoretical equivalent to postmodernist developments in aesthetics and postfordist developments in the economy, the supposed ‘founding fathers’ of poststructuralism, notably Foucault (1994: 447) and Derrida (1999: 241f), never accepted the labels ‘poststructuralism’ and ‘postmodernism’ (Angermuller 2015). These terminological problems notwithstanding, since the 1980s, ‘poststructuralism’ has become an established point of reference in the interdisciplinary debate, where it designates a body of reflexive, anti-essentialist and post-humanist theory.

Broadly speaking, poststructuralism has resulted from three conjunctures. A first conjuncture took place in the 1960s and 1970s in Paris, where some theorists and intellectuals engaged in the controversy over structuralism, understood as the application of Saussure’s differentialist theory of language to cultural and social life more generally (Ducrot, et al. 1968). If structuralism proper remained a fairly short-lived fashion around 1966/67, those who have become the canonical figures of poststructuralism reacted in various ways: Foucault’s early work (1966) clearly builds on structuralist insights, which he later renounces, whereas Derrida’s deconstructive philosophy (1967) radicalises Saussure’s relational method in order to reveal its inherent aporias. Some theorists of poststructuralism never adhered to structuralism (Deleuze 2002: 238ff.; Lyotard 1983) whereas others remained faithful (Althusser 2003).

The label ‘poststructuralism’ was established during the second conjuncture around 1980 (Angermuller 2015: 69-82), when French (and other ‘Continental’) theorists were received in the North American humanities (Ehrmann 1970). Initially, the second generation of poststructuralist intellectuals can be divided into an ‘East Coast’ (Yale) branch promoting Derridian deconstruction as a text-centered method in literary criticism (e.g. Bloom, et al. 1979) and a Californian branch where Foucault’s more historical and sociological work on knowledge/power met with resonance (e.g. Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983). During the 1980s, poststructuralism helped spawn a number of ‘Studies’, most paradigmatically Cultural Studies (e.g. Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler 1992).

These literary and cultural fields testify to a number of ‘turns’ in the social sciences and humanities (Bachmann-Medick 2006), which have constituted a third conjuncture of poststructuralism since the 1990s. The paradigmatic one is the ‘linguistic turn’, which is inspired by both analytical philosophers of language (Rorty 1967) and semiotic-structuralist traditions (Fraser 1995; Guilhaumou 1993) and challenges the idea of language mirroring a reality before and outside language. More recently, one can register a practice turn, which focuses on practices as performative and creative rather than as reflecting an intention or following a given script (Schatzki, Cetina and Savigny 2001), a visual turn, which refers to the uses of images in contemporary life (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), a material turn, which insists on the materiality of social and cultural practices (or New Materialism, Beetz and Schwab 2017) and a political turn, which argues for the primacy of the political over the social (Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000).

| <b>Discussion highlights</b> | <b>Around 1970 in France</b>                  | <b>Around 1980 in the USA</b>   | <b>Since the mid-nineties in Europe</b>                     |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Common labels                | <i>structuralisme, Marxisme, psychanalyse</i> | (High) Theory, (Cultural) Studies, especially Yale: poststructuralism | In Germany: <i>Poststrukturalismus, Dekonstruktivismus,</i> |
| Key representatives          | Lacan, Althusser, Foucault, Lévi-Strauss,     | Paul de Man,  |   |

|                          |  |  |   |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|
|                          | Deleuze,<br>Derrida,<br>Lyotard,<br>Barthes,<br>Certeau,<br>Kristeva,<br>Baudrillard | Judith Butler,<br>Gayatri Spivak,<br>Fredric Jameson,<br>Edward Said, Homi<br>Bhabha | Slavoj Žižek, Ernesto<br>Laclau, Chantal<br>Mouffe, Giorgio<br>Agamben, Antonio<br>Negri, Jacques<br>Rancière, Alain<br>Badiou, perhaps Niklas<br>Luhmann |
| (Imaginary)<br>opponent  | Humanism   | (European)<br>Modernity,<br>essentialism, binary<br>opposition                       | 'Old European theory',<br>autonomous subject,<br>container-society  |
| Leading<br>discipline    | Linguistics  | Literary criticism<br>(mostly English)   | Political philosophy<br>and theory, especially<br>in Germany: radical<br>and cognitive<br>constructivism  |
| Disciplines<br>concerned | <i>sciences<br/>humaines</i> (with<br>linguistics,<br>against<br>philosophy)         | Humanities<br>(without social<br>sciences, linguistics,<br>philosophy)               | In Germany:<br><i>Sozial- und<br/>Geisteswissenschaften</i>   |
| 'Paradigm'               | Poststructuralism  |  |   |

Table 1: three conjunctures of poststructuralism (Angermuller 2015: 19)

With its insistence on the nexus of language and power, poststructuralism has been a crucial source of inspiration social scientists and humanists interested in discourse. It is no wonder, therefore, that many observers equate poststructuralism with discourse theory and discourse analysis. Poststructuralist discourse theories can be found in political science (think of Laclau/Mouffe's hegemony and discourse analysis approach, 1985; also known as post-foundational discourse analysis, Marttila 2016), in cultural and political sociology (Hall, et al. 1980; Dean 1994), in history (cf. White 1987), in psychology (e.g. earlier work in discursive psychology, Potter and Wetherell 1987; and later work in critical psychology, Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar 2014) and in Cultural Studies (Said 1978). In these fields, 'discourse analysis' and 'poststructuralism' are used interchangeably, often drawing on Foucault's work on knowledge/power and governmentality, Derrida's deconstructive critique of Western 'logocentrism' or on Lacan's interrogations of the split subject.

In these interdisciplinary debates, poststructuralism touches on a number of questions that more specialised disciplinary knowledge easily loses sight of, such as:

- a) The question of constitutive representation: If language does not simply represent social reality, how do linguistic representations contribute to constituting what is considered as real in society?
- b) The question of constructed subjectivity and agency: If actors do not use language to express their intentions, how are they enacted as 'free', 'autonomous', intentional beings through discourse practices?
- c) The question of reflexive critique: If knowledge is constructed under conditions of power and inequality, how can discourse scholars account for the critical effects their own discursive practice has on their objects?

### 3.2. Challenging the structuralist heritage of Discourse Studies

While 'poststructuralism' has promoted the linguistic turn the social sciences and humanities, it has stimulated the intellectual imagination of some linguists interested in 'social and cultural stuff'. If concepts such as 'translanguaging', 'crossing' and 'superdiversity' resonate with poststructuralist tropes and themes, it is within the area of Applied Linguistics, where poststructuralist ideas have been cited

most explicitly. Some linguists explicitly refer to poststructuralism in order to re-examine the epistemological bases of the field and cited as a model for a reflexive critique of power (McNamara 2012; Busch 2012; Norton and Morgan 2013; Schmitz 2017). In language teaching, poststructuralism has helped revalue subjective experience (Pavlenko 2002; Bernstein 2016; Kramsch 1998) whereas in sociolinguistics it has helped articulate anti-essentialist perspectives on identity and agency (Baxter 2016; Carter 2013; Kiesling 2006; Motschenbacher 2009).

However, if poststructuralism has been so successful in establishing discourse as an interdisciplinary problematic, why have many linguistic discourse analysts been reticent to claiming the label? Many strands in linguistic discourse analysis, whose name goes back to Harris' distributionalism (1952), started to develop long before the poststructuralist engagements with social, cultural and political theory. And more than poststructuralist discourse theories, linguistic discourse analysis places emphasis on the wide range of tools and methods for analysing linguistic material.

Linguistic discourse analysis typically aims at opening linguistic analysis to levels beyond words and sentences. It comprises a number of perspectives, for instance quantitative approaches such as corpus linguistics, which uses quantifying tools to reveal patterns in large collections of text, as well as qualitative tools from interactional analysis, which insists on the sequential place of utterances within a dialogue. Early discourse analysts were often influenced by textlinguistics, which flags up the cotext of an utterance, i.e. the way utterances are woven together as a text. And it is difficult to underestimate the influence of functional and pragmatic views on language which reflect on the context in which utterances are used (cf. the 'French' tradition of enunciative pragmatics, Benveniste 1974; 'Anglosaxon' systemic functionalism, Halliday 1978; or 'German' functional pragmatics, Ehlich 1986).

In the late 1960s, the first (linguistic) discourse analysts began to dialogue with social theory, especially with macrosociological, Marxist concepts of power and inequality. As a result, two schools of Discourse Studies were born, namely 'French School' or 'French' Discourse Studies (FDS, cf. Williams 1999; Maingueneau 1994) and 'Critical Discourse Analysis' or 'Critical Discourse Studies' (CDS, Flowerdew and Richardson 2017), which are the internationally most recognized ones. While FDS was influenced by structuralist Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Pêcheux 1975), the theoretical references of CDS are more eclectic and include critical realism as well as dialectical Marxism (Fairclough 2017). FDS and CDS do not normally claim the label 'poststructuralism' even though both like to cite (French) discourse theorists, especially Michel Foucault and Michel Pêcheux. FDS show a strong affinity to poststructuralist ideas such as the opaque materiality of language and the heterogeneity of discourse. Yet FDS researchers usually see the term 'poststructuralism' as an invention of Anglophone colleagues (Žižek 1991: 142; Angermüller 2007). And while CDS theorists such as Fairclough and Jäger are strongly influenced by Foucault and Pêcheux (Fairclough 2013: 185; Jäger 2007), they normally do not share the constructivist, anti-humanist and reflexive orientations of poststructuralist discourse theorists whose emphasis tends to be on conceptual work.

One may cite many more strands in discourse research, notably those who have engaged explicitly with poststructuralism, e.g. in textlinguistics in Germany (a perspective from Germany, Warnke 2007) or in critical research on language commodification (a perspective from Spain, Rojo 1997). In the following, I will focus on the internationally more recognized strands of FDS and CDS, which have overcome structuralism only partially. Nobody in CDS is in favour of structuralist conceptions (Wodak 2007) and even FDS has largely turned towards pragmatics (Angermüller 2014; Maingueneau 1990). Yet power and inequality ('the social') are still conceived of in structuralist terms, namely as a structural opposition between top and bottom, between the oppressors and the oppressed. Against this background, both FDS and CDS cannot but benefit from a more explicit engagement with poststructuralist ideas.

'French' Discourse Studies goes back to a group of Paris-based linguists and philosophers, who applied linguistic methods, including corpus analysis and distributionalism, to account for communication in the political arena as early as in the 1960s (e.g. Robin 1973). With their pioneering discourse theoretical works, Michel Foucault (1969) and Michel Pêcheux (1969) put 'discourse' on the agenda

of a broader intellectual debate, which was under the impression of Marxism, psychoanalysis and structuralism. Unlike Foucault, who was always a solitary intellectual and soon turned back to more historical questions, Pêcheux became the head of what is sometimes called the French School of Discourse Analysis (Pêcheux 1990). For Pêcheux, discourse operates with utterances under the conditions of class struggle. Utterances form networks of utterances (i.e. discursive formations) through which discourse participants relate to their place in the class structure. In the wake of these highly recognized theorists, a 'French' debate about discourse has emerged which has been highly productive conceptually speaking (Charaudeau and Maingueneau 2002; Détrie, Siblot and Verine 2001) and is characterised by its analytical focus on written texts taken in their 'opaque materiality' (Conein, et al. 1981). Since the 1980s, FDS has since seen a turn towards pragmatics and 'enunciation', i.e. the activity of using texts in context, which undermines the division into two separate domains of language and of society (Charaudeau 1983; Maingueneau 1991). If today in France there is an increasing interest in investigating discourse as empirical objects (rather than theorising it in terms of 'poststructuralism'), the more intellectual and theoretical, the political and critical orientations of earlier generations in FDS are especially alive in Brazil (Orlandi 1990; Possenti 2009), where they sometimes merge with the interdisciplinary debates about poststructuralism. FDS have also been taken up in countries with Francophone or Francophile research cultures including Switzerland (Pêcheux 1975), Belgium (Rosier 1999), Israel (Amossy 2005) or Portugal (Pinto 1997).

The other internationally branded strand is Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), which has currency in the countries of Commonwealth, including the United Kingdom, Australia, Hongkong, as well as in the German-speaking and Spanish-speaking world. Just like FDS, CDS has fired the imagination of linguists who consider language as a social phenomenon and like to dialogue with the social sciences. CDS goes back to the late 1970s, when critical linguists started to explore the relationship of language use and its social conditions. By the 1990s, the label of Critical Discourse Analysis has become an umbrella term of theoretically eclectic strands of discourse research which are oriented towards social problems. To distinguish between 'French' and 'Critical' strands of Discourse Studies is not without problems since some of their references are the same. And while discourse reserachers with the 'French' label are not necessarily French, many 'French' discourse researchers have seen themselves in the critical tradition of Marxism (Angermuller 2017).

Just like FDS today, the major protagonists of CDS concur in the rejection of language as an abstract system, which has been summed up by Norman Fairclough's dictum of discourse as 'simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice' (Fairclough 1992: 4). Based on pragmatic and interactional models of discourse, Reisigl/Wodak insist on the social and historical context of language use (Reisigl and Wodak 2009). Thus, both FDS and CDS conceptualise discourse as a meaning-making activity which shapes and is shaped by the social structures in which language is used. And just like FDS, CDS questions structural linguistics. Yet neither has challenged structuralist conceptions of society. CDS tend to rely on Marxist class models, perhaps through British sociology during the 1970s, when Bernstein (1971) collaborated with MAK Halliday (whose systemic-functional linguistics is the basis for a great deal of CDA work, Fairclough 1995; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006).

### 3.3. Poststructuralism in Discourse Studies

From a poststructuralist viewpoint, FDS and CDS have only come half way in freeing themselves from their structuralist heritage. While they have turned to pragmatic conceptions of language in use, they tend to view society as a power structure where all social positions are clearly defined top down. Such a view is problematical since it risks reifying 'society' as a reality to which discourse researchers claim privileged access. While structuralist explanations have come under attack in many corners of the social sciences since the late 1970s (as well as within linguistics if one thinks of the turn towards the actor in sociolinguistics), CDS and FDS would do well to discuss the shortcomings of sociological structuralisms more explicitly.

If poststructuralist orientations insist on the nexus of language, power and subjectivity, they have initiated a turn toward the praxis dimension of linguistic and social order. In particular, poststructuralism invites to theorise the way structures are made and unmade in discursive practices without giving up a critical reflexive take on the question of power and inequality. Occupying the critical intellectual space that had been instituted by Karl Marx's and Sigmund Freud's work on the hidden forces of inequality and the unconscious during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Poststructuralist Discourse Studies follows the linguistic turn, which invites social, cultural and political theorists to apply linguistic models – notably those of Saussure and of the later Wittgenstein – to non-linguistic problems and objects, and the practice turn, which builds on a broad alliance from the pragmatists, Wittgenstein to Foucault and Bourdieu. The question, then, is how social and linguistic structures are constituted by discursive practices (which intentional, strategic actors are never entirely in control of).

In order to reveal the constructed foundations of the social, poststructuralism is sympathetic with views on doing the social and sometimes resonates with interactionist and pragmatist work if one thinks of such developments as early discursive psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1987), positioning theory (Langenhove and Harré 1999), the small story approach (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou), feminist (e.g. Smith 1999) and 'new materialist' ethnographies (Latour 1987), more theoretically minded ethnomethodology (Widmer 1986), the sociology of scientific knowledge (Ashmore, Myers and Potter 1995) and the 'new pragmatism' in sociology (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991). If the structuralist hegemony ended in linguistics long ago, the social sciences, too, have seen a crisis of structuralist logics of explanation. Just like structuralism in linguistics, social scientists have suspected structuralism for its

- proclivity for abstraction. Can there be structural rules that are applied independently of the specific situation and circumstances of action?
- implied normativity. Do practices always need to conform to a structural code or system in order to be socially meaningful?
- epistemological God's-eye-view. Does the analyst occupy a privileged epistemological position vis-à-vis the practical knowhow of language users?

While FDS and CDS see discourse as a practice within more or less constituted social structures, poststructuralist discourse theories consider discursive practices as constitutive of the social. More than FDS and CDS, poststructuralism places emphasis on the way representations are made 'real', knowledge 'true' and relationships 'natural'. While in Pêcheux language is functional for class struggle (Pêcheux 1975), poststructuralist discourse theorists ask how discourse articulates the social as an antagonistic space. And more than representatives of CDS who believe there are true or false representations of the social, poststructuralists see discourse as a practice that not only represents the social but, through representation, brings it forth. Poststructuralist discourse theorists, in other words, problematise the social as a given, stable and naturalised order before and outside language. It is against this background that a number of poststructuralist discourse theorists have examined the ways practices and structures are articulated in discourse, for instance:

- In the *Archaeology*, Michel Foucault (1969) formulated the contours of a pragmatic discourse theory which perceives the utterance (*énoncé*, sometimes translated as 'statement') as the smallest unit of discourse and ask how utterances are organised in organised ensembles (i.e. discursive formations). In the 1970s, Foucault proposed a number of historical case studies to undermine the view of power as the property of one centralising source ('the government'). In some interviews of the 1970s (Foucault 1980), he stresses the 'productive' dimensions of power which does not repress but makes possible certain practices. And in his lectures on governmentality (Foucault 2004; Mills 1997), Foucault testifies to his more sociological interests in power as a set of discursive practices which produce and reproduce social order. As governance from a distance, neoliberalism has subjects act in the mode of 'freedom' and subjects a large population to a framework of control and supervision (Rose 1989; Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2000; Dean 1994).

- In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) outlined a political theory of hegemony which turns against the determinism of Marxist social theory. For Laclau/Mouffe, political practice is never entirely determined by underlying social structures or lawlike rules. The political is perceived as an articulatory practice that combines elements (such as 'demands') to form a hegemonic bloc. This practice is contingent in as much as it does more than merely reproducing a given social order. In their view, discourse refers to the way political acts create chains of equivalence between different elements. Promising to fill a constitutive lack in the social, political subjectivities need to be seen as a result of discursive practices rather than as their source (Torfing 1999; Howarth and Glynn 2007; Cleeve and Stavrakakis 2017).
- In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (1990) takes on the heterosexual matrix as an institutionally established regime of male-female gender difference. For Butler, gender identities are not naturally given; they are enacted and constructed in discursive practices. And through performative repetition, such identities can be reinforced or undermined. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler (1993) responds to critics who warn against seeing all, notably biological realities as discursively constructed. Butler does not object to some distinctions such as between male and female or between (biological) sex and (cultural) gender as more material than others (Cameron and Kulick 2003). Her question is how such oppositions turn into material and objective facts through performative repetition (cf. the performative turn in Discourse Studies, Licoppe 2010).

Against this background, Poststructuralist Discourse Studies ask how order emerges from linguistic practices which are neither intentionally controlled nor structurally determined, at least not entirely. To perceive discourse as a social practice of using language does not deny the existence of structures. Rather, while PDS reject the causalist idea of the social as an objective ground of discursive practice, it considers discursive practices as shaping, and being shaped by, the social.

The major questions, themes and interests of Poststructuralist Discourse Studies can be summed up in the following four points (cf. Angermüller 2014: 83-102):

- Firstly, while PDS is critical of the intentional strategic actor and the author as authority, it is interested to analyse the discursive construction of subjectivity. It is important to understand how recognition and visibility is allocated in discourse through discursive subject positions. PDS reveals the intricate entwinements of subjectivation with the dynamics of power. It asks how individuals turn into subjects in performative acts of naming and how they are established in symbolically mediated processes. It perceives agency as an effect of discursive practices rather than as their source. It insists on the divisions of a subject which can never be one with itself. The subject engage in discursive practices in order to create an illusion of inner unity.
- Secondly, PDS places emphasis on the practices constituting the social. Rather than expressing a strategy, these practices need to be understood in their opaque materiality, i.e. in terms of their institutional function rather than as an intentional project of actors. Practices are grounded in the material world. They mobilise human as well as non-human resources, cognitive and material stuff. And language is a medium through which practices can be performed and orchestrated. While discursive practices rely on language used in a context, discourse participants enter discourse by performing speech acts through which the social is articulated.
- Thirdly, the social is seen as an open and fluid terrain of subjectivities rather than a closed container of fixed positions. It is a heterogeneous space where elements are tied together in discursive formations. Through discourse, the social is subject to 'policing' practices which flatten and smoothen the social out and make it governable. By entering discourse, the participants occupy subject positions all of which are not equal. A few discourse participants occupy highly valuable positions while many none at all (Angermüller 2018a).

- Fourthly, as a space which shape and are shaped by discursive practices, the social is subject to reflexive critique (Angermüller 2018b). Critique, in other words, is immanent to the social: it is based on criteria which are the very product of the society it subjects to critique (Herzog 2016). It recognizes the critical awareness of the discourse participants. As critical experts discourse analysts are never neutral; they, too, take part in the struggles over what counts as truth and what is valuable (Zienkowski 2017; Nonhoff 2017).

#### 4. Three challenges for Poststructuralist Discourse Studies

Poststructuralist orientations have struggled to become established within Discourse Studies, not least because of considerable disciplinary cleavages between linguistics, where discourse analysis designates a well-established subfield, and other fields in the social sciences and humanities, where 'discourse' is more likely to be used to designate certain theoretical schools and intellectual fashions. With its focus on post-humanist, anti-essentialist and constructivist epistemologies, poststructuralism has resonated with the theoretical and interpretive social sciences and humanities. And while one typically associates poststructuralism with the linguistic turn in social theory, it is important to point out a certain mismatch between the way language and society are conceptualised across the disciplines. This situation leads me to point out three challenges of PDS: a) the challenge of interdisciplinary communication, b) a methodological deficit and c) the normative challenge.

- a) Interdisciplinary communication is riddled by divergences between disciplinary debates. To give an example, while almost no linguist nowadays would self-identify as a structuralist, and even in French Discourse Studies, which originated under the influence of structuralism, pragmatics and other currents have taken over, some commentators outside linguistics refer to Saussurean structural linguistics as if it reflected the current state of the art in linguistics. Conversely, there are probably few professional sociologists or political scientists today who would make the case for society as a top-down power structure which FDS and CDS sometimes assume.

If one wants to make the case for poststructuralist orientations within Discourse Studies, it is important to deal with such asymmetries (or misunderstandings?) in cross-disciplinary communication. Moreover, more than PDS, CDS and FDS are heavily indebted to debates among linguists with little interest in constructivist, anti-humanist and practice-oriented developments in other social sciences. A first challenge for the future, therefore, is to reflect on those hidden (or not so hidden) cleavages which make discourse researchers choose this rather than that label. And one may also point out the important role of language as a medium of scientific communication. If poststructuralism sometimes draws on a 'French' philosophical culture, it has been crucially stimulated by transatlantic encounters between North America and France. Yet one needs to recognize important contributions from outside the Western world, from Latin America and elsewhere, where one can also find French-speaking discourse analysts. Yet how does Poststructuralist Discourse Studies relate to an unequal global space where certain intellectual styles and cognitive orientations are hegemonic?

- b) A second challenge for Poststructuralist Discourse Studies is what has been called the methodological deficit in poststructuralist discourse theory (Zienkowski 2012; Marttila 2016). While some have also been motivated by activist considerations, many practitioners of PDS came to discourse analysis through theoretical works, especially from such theorists as Foucault, Laclau/Mouffe and Butler. It is clear that poststructuralism has appealed to those academics with conceptual obsessions, which is reflected in the elaborate body of theoretical work that comments on various aspects of discourse theory. However, since it is easy fall into the traps of repetition and intellectual routine, PDS should not only have the courage to leave trodden theoretical paths but also to apply its insights and intuitions to new social problems and also to empirical objects. While some of the canonical figureheads of PDS have enjoyed enormous publicity (which has entailed misrecognition of so many others figures, which

should be an object of a reflexive critique in the field in its own right), the creative work that has been done to come up with viable research designs, methodological solutions and new conceptual models has perhaps not always been given the recognition as much as it should be. Is this the reason why more theoretically-minded discourse researchers in the poststructuralist vein do not easily see the impressive number of tools and devices for the analysis of linguistic material that more linguistic oriented discourse research has been working with? The list of methodological tools and approaches seems almost endless. It has required and will require more integration and synthesis to make the many methodological tools of discourse analysis available to discourse researchers (Angermuller, et al. 2014; Angermuller, Maingueneau and Wodak 2014).

- c) More than CDS, PDS has perhaps particular self-reflexive ambitions concerning the claims it makes and the critical projects it pursues. Some of the more activist colleagues in Discourse Studies have therefore reproached PDS for being overly self-reflexive and sometimes even for indulging in academic navel-gazing. For PDS, it is crucial to ask how it can make a positive, critical contribution to the social world. PDS is always part and parcel of the struggles it wants to investigate. Yet this does not mean that all scientific and non-scientific claims are equal. Rather, discourse researchers would do well to reflect on the social conditions of their own discursive practice. They should ask who becomes visible and recognized in Discourse Studies? They should reflect on what makes discourse researchers aware of critical, political questions and on how they become relevant in non-academic struggles. And while PDS should have no illusions over the difference that some academics can make in view of great societal challenges environmental disasters and capitalist exploitation, racism and post-democracy, it should insist on the value of discourse research both within the academic world as well as without (cf. Angermuller 2018b).

## 5. Summary

'Poststructuralism' designates ongoing theoretical and political debates since the 1970s which have placed 'discourse' centrestage in the theoretical discourse of the social sciences and humanities. Occupying the intellectual space of Marxism and psychoanalysis until the 1960s, poststructuralism comprises intellectuals such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Louis Althusser in France and Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak and Ernesto Laclau/Chantal Mouffe in the Anglo-American world. These poststructuralist theorists are known for their theoretical accounts of the entanglements of language, subjectivity and power as well as for their critical role in contemporary struggles (e.g. over gender, postcolonialism, populism). While discourse is a central notion in their interrogations, Discourse Studies as a field has shown ambivalence towards poststructuralism. Among the more established strands in linguistics, the 'French School' tradition, i.e. the post-Pêcheux developments in French-speaking Discourse Studies, commonly do not accept the term, which is widely seen as an invention by international colleagues, and they do not share the strong epistemological, intellectual and political impetus of first-generation discourse theorists. Furthermore, Critical Discourse Studies, which have dominated in the Commonwealth countries, prefers (critical) realism over the more radical constructivism in poststructuralism (Fairclough 2013: 181ff.). However, many discourse researchers, especially outside linguistics, are crucially inspired by poststructuralism, which is why poststructuralism is a major reference point for the interdisciplinary debate and for linguistics as well. Poststructuralist Discourse Studies go beyond structuralist conceptions of language and society. While it has opened up structuralist accounts of power and inequality to the practical dimensions of discourse, the productive encounters between poststructuralism and practice theories have led to post-humanist conceptions of subjectivity. PDS draws on poststructuralist topoi (such as the critique of the sovereign subject and language as a socially constitutive practice) and formulates a critique of the structuralist, top-down logic of explanation which had characterized earlier tendencies. At the

same time, it insists on reflexivity as a method of accounting for the critical effects discourse analysts have on their objects of investigation. Therefore, Poststructuralist Discourse Studies fills an important gap as it bridges structure and practice perspectives on discourse in order to account for the discursive construction of social reality.

## 6. Further Reading

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