A likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility.

—Aristotle (384 BC–322 BC), Rhetoric

Chapter Overview

As noted in Chapter 12, the content of almost any medium from papyrus to podcast can be analyzed. This chapter provides an overview of some primarily qualitative approaches to understanding and explicating content. These include:

- Rhetorical and dramatic analyses—the study of argumentation and persuasion.
- Narrative, discourse, and conversation analyses—the study of stories and talking.
- Semiotics—the study of signs, interpretation, and meaning.
- Critical analyses—the study of the forces behind the content.

These approaches share a common interest in using words rather than numbers to understand, interpret, and report content. The approaches can differ considerably in perspective. For example, conversation analysts look closely, second by second, at the transcripts of conversations to understand human interaction whereas rhetoricians are more likely to step back and analyze the strategic use of language in order to assess the persuasive power of a speech or an advertisement. This chapter in particular captures the concept behind the book’s subtitle—"Paths of Inquiry." As you follow the examples in this chapter, you should see that qualitative analyses of text offer you many different paths to understanding and explaining media content.

Starter Questions

- What are the advantages of qualitative approaches to understanding content?
- What do qualitative methods have in common other than being qualitative?
- How do I sample content for qualitative analyses?
- Can I make generalizations from rhetorical, semiotic, and narrative studies?
- Can any type of content be analyzed using any method?
- Are multiple interpretations of content possible?
Introduction: Advantages and Disadvantages of Qualitative Analyses of Content

Collectively, one advantage to the methods discussed in this chapter is the multiplicity of approaches to understanding text and image. Any given text, image, or documented human interaction is potentially capable of being analyzed from multiple perspectives.

The analytic approaches outlined in this chapter are diverse but share a common interest in interpretation, that is in understanding what content analysts might refer to as the latent content of communication. As you will recall from Chapter 12, the primary interest of content analysis is in manifest or observable content. The approaches in this chapter go beyond just developing a taxonomy of content and counting observable content; they seek to understand and interpret content. Suppose, for example, that a quantitative content analysis of comedy television demonstrates that certain occupations are predominantly played by minority characters. The approaches in this chapter would seek to analyze the same content but with a view to describing, understanding, and explaining how these minority characters interact with other characters, who the heroes and villains are and how we know which is which, how viewers’ perceptions of minorities are shaped by language and image, what aspects of the characters’ speech makes them credible or not, and what interests are served by portraying minorities and occupations in a particular way.

The possibility of multiple interpretations for any given content can be a frustration for the interested reader seeking a definitive interpretation, but scholars using the approaches in this chapter are generally interested in interpretive possibilities. They accept that there can be more than one way of understanding content and may well take the view that one definitive interpretation is impossible. Metaphorically, this means simply that some scholars opt to view the world through a telescope whereas others may prefer a microscope or satellite imagery. To revisit the metaphor introduced in Chapter 1, researchers simply opt to travel different roads or use different modes of transportation. If from the perspective of a quantitative researcher qualitative methods can be accused of operating with less precision, they can also be credited with providing close readings and multiple perspectives that enhance our understanding. These result in a rich ongoing discussion of how human communication should be understood and insights that numbers alone cannot provide.

We begin this discussion with one of the oldest approaches to understanding human communication—rhetoric—and with a founding figure of communication theory—Aristotle.

Rhetorical Analyses

Aristotelian Analysis

The birth of European rhetoric dates to at least the 5th century BCE and the need for members of emerging democratic communities to debate and to argue successfully on political and legal issues. For some readers the word rhetoric may conjure up unfortunate associations such as “mere rhetoric” or “empty rhetoric.” Rhetoric, though held in low esteem by many writers as mere linguistic adornment or appearance, was reformulated by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE) as the study of the available means of persuasion in any given situation. In this context, rhetorical analysis means examining communication content to identify and assess its persuasive strategies. While the focus at the time was on how an advocate or a politician might successfully argue for a cause, rhetorical analyses today can be used to assess the persuasiveness...
Chapter 13 — Rhetorical and Critical Analyses

... of advertising, editorial columns, and blogs, and the persuasive strategies of corporations, nonprofit agencies, and individuals behind such content.

Aristotle proposed that the purpose of argumentation was not to discover verifiable absolute truths but rather to influence belief—what people thought was true. Argumentation therefore was based on probability. It meant demonstrating to an audience that the speaker's argument was more likely than other arguments and leaving the audience with the highest level of certainty that the argument was valid.

It is unfair to distill the breadth and richness of Aristotelian analysis down to just a few concepts, but Aristotle's identification of ethos, pathos, and logos as keys to successful persuasion remain an enduring contribution to communication research in the 21st century.

- Logos addresses the use of fact and logic. The assumption is that audiences engage in rational decision making, and so the speaker can lead audiences through such thought processes as induction and deduction (Chapter 2) to arrive at a conclusion.
- Pathos addresses the use of emotion. For better or worse, humans are not cold-blooded logic machines. Aristotle recognized that the variety of human emotions might also lead individuals to prefer one argument over another. He wrote about common human emotions, recognizing that an orator would need to draw on emotion to be persuasive.
- Ethos addresses the nature or character of the speaker. For Aristotle, ethos was the most important of these three modes of persuasion. Rational argument and appeal to emotions would have little or no effect unless the audience saw the speaker as credible and of good character.

Credibility and good character are of course always in the mind of the beholder. A fourth and important consideration in Aristotelian rhetoric therefore was the audience and its characteristics. Audience was what drove the nature of the speech. Related, Aristotle identified sources or topics of argument that might help an orator develop a persuasive argument. He identified special topics for use in legal settings, ceremonial settings, and deliberative or political settings. Obviously a speech appropriate to one setting would not be appropriate to another. We can see Aristotle's ideas at work in the 21st century. Politicians, for example, tailor their speeches to specific audiences and invest a great deal of effort in convincing voters of their good character.

Analyzing persuasive content such as speeches, advertising, and editorials using an Aristotelian framework gives us insight on whether the content might or might not be effective. In analyzing an advertisement, for example, we might examine for its persuasive effect the nature and character of the spokesperson(s), the use of fact and logic, and the use of emotion. While this can be done purely from the researcher's perspective, in principle the assessment is done with respect to the effect of the content on the target audience.

Dramatistic Analysis

Kenneth Burke, a 20th-century literary theorist, devised a dramatistic approach to communication behavior. He regarded communication essentially as performance, as actors acting out a drama against a particular background or scenario.

Burke's dramatistic pentad (five-part) analysis asks the following questions:

- **Act**—what act is taking place?
- **Agent**—who is taking this action?
- **Agency**—how or by what means did the act take place?
- **Scene**—where and when did the act take place?
- **Purpose**—why was the act done?
Burke believed that by examining the first four components of the pentad, one could obtain an answer to the question posed by the fifth—what was the purpose or motivation of the act?

For example, our Chapter 12 hypothetical study of substance use in comic strips could be analyzed using Burke’s pentad. If we identify an act (smoking), an agent (employee), an agency (offer of a cigarette from the boss), and a scene (work), we might infer a purpose or motivation, which is not always overt or explicit, of the boss trying to socialize with the employee.

Burke proposed that information about the dynamics and motivations of communication could be obtained by “ratio analysis.” Ratio analysis means examining the relative significance of each pentad unit in any given situation, for example act-scene, act-agent, act-agency, act-purpose, agent-agency, agent-scene, and so on. By examining all of these ratios, we can gain insight into the motives behind the communication, uncover a dominant motivation, or reveal inconsistencies between elements.

For example, if we examine a series of comic strips and find that the scene (workplace) was a dominant element every time the employee was offered a cigarette, we might infer that the boss was attempting to socialize the employee into part of an organizational culture and demonstrating a workplace norm (smoking) more than just cultivating an interpersonal relationship with the employee.

**Fantasy Theme Analysis**

Fantasy theme analysis, pioneered by professor Ernest Bormann (1972), is a method of rhetorical analysis that provides a way of understanding group consciousness and the development of shared values. Fantasy themes are sagas, stories, or ideas shared by members of a group. These themes give members of the group a common perspective, motivate them, and provide a shared understanding of the group’s accomplishments. As with Burke’s dramatistic analysis, fantasies involve characters in a setting acting out a theme or plotline. Fantasies typically emerge out of uncertainty as to what the group is all about or how it should handle a new, problematic situation. Over time, competing stories emerge of how the group in its situation should be understood. Eventually, one master narrative gains credence with members to the point of symbolic convergence or an agreed understanding of what unites group members, differentiates the group from other groups, and explains their successes or failures.

The role of the researcher using fantasy theme analysis is to identify the characters involved in the fantasy, the scene, the plotline, the rationale, or the logic behind the fantasy and the master analog or deeper structure within the vision. Analysts may be interested in broad fantasy types such as conspiracy theories, the advance of civilization, or manifest destiny. They may also look for a sanctioning agent such as God’s will or justice for all that legitimizes the fantasy. The raw material for fantasy theme analysis can include interviews with group members, organizational histories, mission statements, and the like and even seemingly minor items like bumper stickers that capture and remind members of the fantasy in three or four words.

Basically, the analyst seeks to uncover the collective vision that sustains the organization or group. A strength of the method is its ability to explain what at first sight might be illogical behaviors. For example, tax resisters or a small start-up company competing against giants in the marketplace might logically recognize that they are fighting against a superior force and will ultimately lose based on their relative lack of resources. A logical decision would be to quit while it is still possible to do so—and before arrest or bankruptcy happens.

It seems illogical to fight a losing battle, but from a careful analysis of documents, speeches, and policy statements, the fantasy theme analyst might discover that group members have adopted a David and Goliath—one individual “in the right” can beat a larger foe—fantasy that motivates them and explains an otherwise illogical behavior. For some such
groups, a powerful vision is the fantasy of martyrdom—the vision that there can be no higher calling than to give up one's life for a worthy cause. In that context, a public defeat of the cause is to be not avoided but welcomed because of the reward of a blessed future that martyrdom will bring.

Fantasy theme analysis as the study of sagas and stories and visions has a close relationship to narrative analysis.

**Narrative Analysis**

**Narrative analysis** is the analysis of the formal properties of stories that people tell and the social role that stories play. It generally attempts to identify a plot, the setting, characters, and the order of events in people's accounts of their lives.

Narratives take on a special meaning depending on the social context and provide meaning to members of that social context. Very likely you will recall narratives told by senior members or members of your peer group when you first moved into a dormitory, started working, or joined a sports team or social group. Typically these narratives are important because they provide examples of the values of an organization and the unofficial but important rules that govern its behavior. For example, a simple narrative from the workplace might describe how a new employee started work showing an impressive display of tattoos, was sent home by a supervisor to cover up, and returned to work wearing clothing that hid the tattoos (or possibly did not return to work). Such a narrative demonstrates expected standards of behavior to new group members and shows who has the power to enforce them.

Similar narratives are told in informal settings such as families and transmit to family members the values and the attributes that make the family unique. The narratives make sense only in the social group within which they are told. The story of Great Uncle Harry riding his bicycle in the snow has a meaning for Uncle Harry's family that it would not have for other families and helps define how his family differs from others.

Narrative analysis pays specific attention to how stories play out over time and how events are sequenced from beginning to end. Analysts may be interested in how narratives are used to mark out the identities of a group and differentiate the group from others. They may focus on the formal properties of stories—that is, the plot, setting, characters, and order of events. They may analyze how stories are reproduced, change over time, or change as a result of the settings in which they are told or are used politically to influence attitudes and behaviors. Analysts may also be interested in identifying key events or “triggers” that flag a vital learning experience or the point at which an organization changed its vision or culture.

The raw material of narrative analysis includes organizational documents such as mission statements and histories, and may also include interviews with organizational members who may be asked specifically to tell stories they have heard, describe key events, or perhaps even talk about the weirdest thing or the funniest thing that happened to them in their organization.

For example, organizational scholar Joanne Martin and colleagues (Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983) describe a story from IBM's history involving the chairman of the board of IBM, known throughout the company, and a young employee in charge of entry to an IBM manufacturing plant. With some considerable trepidation, the employee denied the chairman entry because he was not wearing the correct security badge. Events could have gone in a number of directions at this point, but the outcome was that the chairman got the appropriate badge before entering the plant. Martin et al. (1983) argue that the story was repeated throughout the company and reinforced a collective understanding that everybody, regardless of their status in the organization, should follow the rules.
Metaphor Analysis

The vocabulary of any group includes the analogies and metaphors used by members to explain and interpret their group and to help simplify the complexities and ambiguities that are part of any organization. One such summary device is metaphor—a simple term used to categorize or summarize a more complex entity or concept. You hear them on a daily basis—for example, “This class is hell,” “That music was heavenly,” “On this campus, we are all family.” None of these statements is literally true, but each captures in a brief, compelling way what the experience or organization behind it is all about and, in the case of “family”-type metaphors, simplifies the complexities of a large organization so that its members can easily comprehend it. Metaphors include direction (he was “up” or “down”), color (she was “feeling blue” or “in the pink”), and activities such as war, parenting, cooking, rocket science, or even herding cats.

Metaphor analysis includes a search for the basic or root metaphors that shape the way organizational members think. The raw materials of such research are once again documents and careful interviews with organizational members, along with specific questions that probe for analogies and metaphors in use. For example, Smith and Eisenberg (1987) interviewed employees at Disneyland and discovered words in use such as script, cast, show, costume, and role. They concluded that underlying such terminology was a root metaphor of “drama.” Similarly, they identified another root metaphor—“family”—that had become increasingly adopted over time. Smith and Eisenberg interpreted the conflict described in their paper as the outcome of hard business decisions being made by management conflicting with employees’ views of their organization as a “family.”

The search for governing or root metaphors is inductive; it is built from specific observations of language in use up to a conclusion about metaphors. The root metaphor itself may not be apparent or in common use as a word or phrase. Researchers entering an organization and asking each member “Excuse me, are you a tree?” are likely to be met with looks of befuddlement or even propositions about the researchers’ sanity. On the other hand, careful interviewing may reveal the fact that words such as roots, branches, growth, decay, and change are more commonly used than words such as kill, defend, attack, and territory. A reasonable conclusion from this observation is that the organization or group is best explained by a root metaphor of a living organism growing, changing, adapting, and perhaps being pacifist, at least relative to the root metaphor of war suggested by the second set of terms.

Discourse Analysis

Curt (1994) refers to discourse from a research perspective as the interest in the constructive, productive, or pragmatic uses of language. This interest in how language is used as opposed to studying the characteristics of language itself emerges from the recognition that “language can never neutrally describe the world, because language itself is an active part of the world” (Curt, 1994, p. 234). A discourse analysis, then, is not a search for the cognitions or motivations behind a word or sentence. “Rather, talk and other texts are seen as social practices which are productive of experience, and which construct the realities in which we live” (Curt, 1994, p. 235).

Basically, discourse analysis focuses on how particular labels or concepts are developed and made powerful by the use of language. Discourse analysis has several roots—sociology of knowledge, cultural analysis, rhetoric, the psychology of human interaction, and conversation analysis (introduced below). Predictably then, there are a variety of approaches to discourse analysis, but most analysts would agree that they share a common interest in language as a social practice more than in the language itself. They are interested in the frameworks within which ideas are formulated and the configurations of ideas and concepts that give meaning to physical and social realities.
One scholar (Hajer, 1995) defines discourse as “a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorisations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities” (p. 44).

With computer operating systems as a hypothetical example, let's summarize what a discourse analysis based on the above definition would look like. Let's start with the contestable assumption that, basically, all personal computers can equally well handle such tasks as word processing, graphics processing, e-mail, and video editing and conferencing. The question discourse analysis addresses is how the discourse surrounding each operating system framed perceptions of that system, changed over time, and was, or was not, able to reproduce itself and contest successfully with competing discourses.

More specifically, the analyst might ask what configurations of advertising, news coverage, consumer reviews, web content, and perhaps the writings and speeches of Steve Jobs and Bill Gates led to the perception of two "computer cultures"—Mac and PC—and to the PC as the dominant culture in the marketplace. Decades after the first personal computers, many people probably still have a mind-set that PCs are the computer of business, whereas Macs are the computer of designers, artists, and musicians. This of course may be demonstrably untrue for any given individual user, but the discourse surrounding these operating systems has constructed a reality that many of us choose to live in with respect to these operating systems and shapes our responses to them.

Discourse analysis is best understood as a field of research or an interest area rather than a specific method. It has no specific, agreed procedure, but typically discourse analysis will involve starting with a research question, and selecting samples of news, videos, interview transcripts, social media, and such. Then come coding, which unlike content analysis is qualitative, and analysis. Coding and analysis are basically a search for patterns and variations in content. They vary according to the researcher's perspective on the research and may change as the research and the analyst's thinking progress. Most analyses, though, are based on what the discourse appears to be doing rather than on categories of language or frequencies of occurrence, as with content analysis.

**Conversation Analysis**

Imagine a world with no rules, guidelines, or accepted ways of doing things. Imagine, for example, no traffic rules about what side of the road to drive on, no rules on stopping for red lights, and especially no “right-of-way” rules. Now imagine an analogous scenario with respect to human interaction. The prospect of anyone being able to speak at any time to anybody on any topic may be an ideal of democracy, but it predicts conversational chaos.

One way around this problem is to produce formalized rules such as parliamentary procedure or formal judicial proceedings to control interaction and allow every participant a voice, but these formal rules apply only where organized groups of individuals agree to adopt them. That leaves most people living without any such rules. What, then, governs our daily interactions with other people? That is, what do conversation analysts seek to discover and to document? Conversation analysis has been used to study physician-patient interaction, pilot-to-flight control interaction, business meetings, family discussions, and political debate.

*Document* is an appropriate word here because the raw material of conversation analysis is the transcripts of conversations. Researchers begin with a close reading of such transcripts, marking them up as shown in Exhibit 13.1 to show pauses in a conversation, the time lag between responses, words that get emphasized, where speakers overlap, and so on. From this they are able to document, describe, and classify the unspoken agreements that govern conversations, for example the mechanisms that govern *turn taking* or who speaks next in a conversation and the mechanisms that indicate possible types of responses to a question. These mechanisms are not formal rules with penalties attached to them for noncompliance; rather they are the procedures that individuals follow in order to allow a conversation to take place.
**Exhibit 13.1** Example of Conversation Analysis Transcript

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annotated Transcript</th>
<th>Explanation of Annotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Brian: What’s the [time?]</td>
<td>13, 14, 15, etc.—line numbers in transcript.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Tshinta: [Almost time to get to class.]</td>
<td>— (left bracket) indicates where Tshinta’s response overlaps with Brian’s question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.3)</td>
<td>— (right bracket) indicates Brian has stopped talking while Tshinta continues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Caroline: Yeah.</td>
<td>(0.3)—denotes timed length in seconds of a pause between speakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Mike: What day’s that guest speaker?</td>
<td>(.)—denotes a just noticeable pause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>Line 17 shows an affiliative response to the question in Line 16; no explanation is required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Caroline: Tuesday.</td>
<td>Line 19 shows a disaffiliative response to the question in Line 18. NOPE in capital letters indicates a much higher speaking volume.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Mike: And. (. ) Can you clear my campus mailbox tomorrow?</td>
<td>An explanation as in Line 20 is required if the conversation is to continue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Caroline: NOPE. No can do.</td>
<td>Line 21: Mike asks a question relevant to each individual in the group. Line 21 requires an answer, but Mike does not call on anyone to provide one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.5)</td>
<td>Line 22: Elizabeth self-nominates as the second speaker, then nominates Tshinta as speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Sorry—uh—gotta go to my—uh—research site and—uh—do—ah—interviews.</td>
<td>Line 23: Tshinta speaks but does not designate the next speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Mike: So when are we working on this project again?</td>
<td>Line 24: After a brief pause, Caroline self-designates as speaker and then engages in self-initiated–self-repair of her error in Line 24.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Tshinta: Nope. We have that guest speaker, remember?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Caroline: How about Tuesday?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If rhetorical and discourse analysts look for the broad sweep of ideas and how they are made persuasive, conversation analysts study the fine detail of human interaction on a second-by-second basis in order to identify the specific rules that allow a conversation to continue as a coordinated sequence of events rather than degenerating into chaos.

Analysts are interested in the mechanisms of a conversation rather than its content. Their focus is specifically on a detailed analysis of the transcripts of conversations and what they reveal rather than the context (work or home, for example) in which the conversation takes place. If a variable such as the gender of a participant explains the nature of a conversation, that conclusion will be drawn from references to gender in the transcript, not from the analyst’s prior knowledge of a participant’s gender. There is therefore no need to work directly with individuals involved in the conversation.

A fundamental notion in conversation analysis is that discrete units of a conversation can be recognized and categorized in order to understand the mechanisms that sustain the conversation. A major difference between conversation analysis and content analysis is that the conversation analyst adds to the conversation’s transcript a standardized series of codes that mark particular aspects of the conversation, such as the time between a speaker’s utterances or the volume of an utterance.

Exhibit 13.1 shows an example of a transcript marked up with some of the basic conversation analysis annotations, with an explanation of the annotations in the right-hand column. The following section sets out some of the basic concepts in conversation analysis.

**Utterances**

Utterances are units of speech preceded by silence and followed either by silence or by another speaker. They are not necessarily linguistic or grammatical units such as sentences or phrases.

**Adjacency Pairs**

Adjacency pairs are units of speech that occur together. They are one of the basic units of conversation analysis. Once the first utterance is heard, a second is required in response. Many adjacency pairs have been identified, including:

**Question—Answer**

What’s the time?
Time for a coffee break.

**Offer—Rejection**

Do you need help with that homework?
Nope! Finished it already.

**Compliment—Acceptance**

You did a great job producing that report.
Thanks. I used Ted’s new graphics software for the cover.

**Greeting—Greeting**

G’day mate.
Well, hello there.
Preference Organization

Preference organization refers to the preferred responses in a conversation. Responses to a question, a compliment, an offer, or a command can be affiliative or disaffiliative. Affiliative responses maintain a link with the speaker; disaffiliative responses break the link with the speaker (Seedhouse, 2004).

Preferred responses are affiliative in that they coordinate the participants, and normative in the sense that they are expected. For example, the response to an invitation is normally expected to be an acceptance. Dispreferred responses are disaffiliative; they have the potential to disrupt a conversation. They stand out and get noticed because they are not the norm. Typically they are associated with some hesitation and require an explanation for the conversation to continue successfully.

Turn Taking

Speaking out of turn is disruptive. If conversations are not to turn into chaos, individuals need to coordinate who speaks when. Nonverbal cues such as body language do not explain this coordination as telephone conversations are accomplished with more precise timing than face-to-face conversations (Levinson, 1983, as cited in Seedhouse, 2004).

Obviously there must be some agreed management system for turn taking, which conversation analysts conceptualize as having two parts—a transitional relevance place (TRP) and a turn constructional unit (TCU). A TRP is the point in the conversation at which turn taking may take place, and the norms of turn taking govern the conversation. For example, if the current speaker designates a second speaker to talk, the current speaker must then stop. If the current speaker does not select a second speaker, then any member of the group may self-select as the next speaker. A TCU is a sentence, a word, or an exclamation that signals a TRP—a point at which turn taking can occur.

Repair Mechanisms

Potentially many things can go wrong in a conversation. When they do, repair mechanisms are necessary. Repair mechanisms are the actions that restore a conversation when it is in danger of breaking down.

Conversation analysts identify four types of repair that might occur when a conversation is running into trouble. These are self-initiated–self-repair, self-initiated–other-repair, other-initiated–self-repair, and other-initiated–other-repair.

Self-initiated–self-repair occurs when speakers identify and correct their own mistakes. From the point of view of maintaining a conversation, this is the most preferred repair mechanism in that, being self-initiated, it gets the conversation back on track efficiently without other participants having to detour from the focus of the conversation to make sense of the mistake and correct it. At the other extreme, other-initiated–other-repair requires the work of other participants, which may lead to further conversational difficulties, to get back on track.

Conversation analysis is distinguished by its attention to the micro-detail of human interaction. You can see from Exhibit 13.1 that transcribing one minute of conversation requires considerably more than one minute of work. Transcription also requires a keen ear and a respect for what was actually said. Conversation analysts do not correct for errors in speech or grammar in the course of transcribing. Their mission is to accurately record, and in the course of transcription to annotate, what they heard. Transcriptions of real conversations are far more complex than the simple examples shown in Exhibit 13.1. Take a look at the recommended websites at the end of this chapter for examples of the detail involved in a scholarly conversation analysis.
Semiotics

A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, according to Shakespeare. On the basis of such thinking is the study of semiotics founded. At heart, semiotics is concerned with the relationship between language, and especially signs, and meaning.

Signs and language are arbitrarily connected to meaning and are culturally specific. You could call a book a “kkjitckl” and it would still be a book, as Shakespeare probably would not have said. “Book” can in fact be an action verb or an object that varies considerably in size, design, cost, and content. Stop signs have a commonly accepted meaning of “Stop—and then proceed when safe to do so.” Taken literally, a stop sign says “Stop!” It does not say “and then proceed when safe to do so,” so where did the “and then proceed” meaning come from, and why do most of us agree to accept that meaning?

Semiotic analysis means exploring the relationships between signs and their meanings. It helps us understand how messages might be interpreted and misinterpreted. Note the plurals. If the relationships between signs and meanings are arbitrary, then multiple interpretations of the relationships are always possible. There are drivers who, at least by their behavior, appear to interpret a stop sign as “Slow down a bit . . . if you feel like it and you do not see a patrol car.”

To take an initial short trip down the semiotic road, analyze your own understanding of the following emoticons, some of which are commonly used in e-mail messages.

1. 😊  2. 😕  3. ;(  4. %-)  5. <}{

• What do you understand each of these emoticons to mean?
• How else might these emoticons be interpreted by other people?
• To what extent do you think your understanding of each emoticon is shared by other people?

Semiotic Thinking: The Tobacco King, Rest Rooms, and Sleeping Policemen

Edward Bernays, a pioneer of U.S. public relations in the 1920s, recalled that in his meetings with a major client, the president of American Tobacco, the president was always seated and always wore his hat in the office. To Bernays, a Freudian by background, this symbolized royalty seated on a throne and wearing a crown. The company president might well have been happy to have that hierarchical interpretation shared among the lesser beings he employed. Semioticians, however, would query the power of such monarchical symbolism in corporate America, post 1776, and indeed whether the hat should be interpreted as monarchical at all. They would want to further question Bernays’s interpretation. For example, could the hat be read as a Lincolnian/presidential top hat generating respect for an American institution—American Tobacco—and its president?

Signs denoting rest rooms often use simplified male and female silhouettes on the door, presumably to bypass any language problems. At one time, such doors in theaters had somewhat elaborate silhouettes of gentlemen in top hats and long tailed coats or coiffured ladies in long evening gowns. A semiotic interpretation might be that theaters at one point tried to reflect, or establish, an image of “up market” entertainment attended by “ladies and gentlemen of class.” Perhaps as the demand for mass entertainment grew, theaters responded via the symbolism on their rest room doors that they were open to all, regardless of class. Thus, the “ladies” and “gentlemen” doors lost their ball gowns and top hats and became class-free and modernistic.
Speed bumps in some countries are referred to as “sleeping policemen.” This seems like a major putdown of the local constabulary—asleep in the middle of the road and driven over at frequent intervals by the motoring public. Semiotics, however, emphasizes the possibilities of interpretation, so what might be another interpretation? A more favorable meaning, at least from the point of view of the police, might be that there is a constant police presence on the roads, ready to “wake up” at any time. Drivers sensitive to the latter meaning would obviously drive with caution, a decision reinforced by the very real consequences of driving at speed over a tangible “sleeping policeman.”

Much applied semiotic research centers on consumer products and the meanings that attach to them (Mick, Burroughs, Hetzel, & Brannen, 2004). In an applied setting, researchers may combine semiotic analyses of new products and product designs with other approaches such as surveys and focus groups to determine what meanings consumers assign to products and why they choose to affiliate with a particular brand. Semiotic researchers have studied how the shapes of vehicles affect memorability of the vehicle brands, the relationship between self-image and the shape of the perfume bottle a woman is likely to buy, and the images conveyed by corporate logos such as those of IBM and Apple.

The value of semiotic analysis is that the researcher explores the multiple possibilities for (mis)interpretation and so becomes alert to all the nuances and possibilities of interpretation associated with a product.

The following section shows one of many approaches to semiotic analysis and how it might be applied in practice.

**Roman Jakobson Visits Sam’s Car Lot**

A classic telecommunications-based model of human communication, introduced in Chapter 1, has four major components—source, message, channel, and receiver.

Linguist and communication theorist Roman Jakobson expanded the model and assigned a **semiotic function** to each component as shown in Exhibit 13.2. Jakobson’s six semiotic functions identify how language functions for specific purposes.

Exhibit 13.2 shows how Jakobson’s semiotic functions might be used to analyze and understand the advertising run by a hypothetical car dealer—Sam. For example, a statement such as “I have to be mad . . .” is an **expressive** statement establishing Sam’s condition. “Come on down . . .” is a **conative** statement establishing Sam’s expectations of his advertising audiences. “Our deals are steals on wheels” is a **poetic** usage; we can take pleasure in the alliteration even if we disagree with Sam’s message. We might infer that Sam assumes that the poetic quality of his phrasing will make his advertising memorable. “We have the nation’s best deals” has the **referential** function of establishing overall what the dominant message of Sam’s advertising is. “Visit, phone, or e-mail” has a **phatic** function; it establishes how communication should take place between Sam and his potential customers. “Sam’s cars are THE cars” is a **metalingual** statement establishing the preferred meaning, or at least Sam’s preferred meaning, of the term Sam’s cars.

Jakobson’s six functions can be used for semiotic analysis in a number of ways. For example, Jakobson argued that one of the six functions is always dominant in a text. Determining which function is dominant would help you understand the motivation behind the message, as with Burke’s ratio analysis. Or you could examine each function systematically to see how emotions, relationship messages, and “play with words” overall help Sam establish an image of his dealership with his advertising audience.

Semiotic analysis is an exercise in the possibilities of interpretation. For an overview of other semiotic theories and their applications, see the resources listed at the end of this chapter.
Exhibit 13.2  Jakobson’s Semiotic Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Component</th>
<th>Semiotic Function</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sender</td>
<td>Expressive.</td>
<td>“I have to be mad to sell at these prices.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describes or establishes the speaker’s condition or emotional state.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiver</td>
<td>Conative.</td>
<td>“Come on down—now!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishes the sender’s expectations of the receiver or what the receiver is expected to do as a result of receiving the message.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message</td>
<td>Poetic.</td>
<td>“Our deals are steals on wheels.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses language for its own pleasure, as in jokes or alliteration because they are pleasurable in their own right.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Referential.</td>
<td>“We have the nation’s best deals in used cars.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishes the communication context, dominant message, or agenda.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>Phatic.</td>
<td>“Visit, phone, or e-mail; let’s hear from you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keeps communication participants “on track” and in contact by establishing how communication will take place.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Metalingual.</td>
<td>“Sam’s cars are THE cars.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishes agreed meaning for words, for example by establishing that Rose refers to the name of a girl, not a flower.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Critical Analyses

Critical analyses explore the way in which communication establishes, reinforces, and maintains power structures in society. As you might anticipate, there are a number of approaches to critical analysis. The ranks of critical theorists are drawn from a variety of disciplines, there are no widely agreed theoretical assumptions or methods, and, as Curt (1994) points out, “writing produced from a critical theory perspective is often pretty impenetrable to the uninitiated”
Introducing Communication Research

(p. 13). Nonetheless, critical scholars share a basic interest in identifying the power structures behind communication content and actions.

One way to understand this interest is to appreciate that all communication is based on having the resources with which to communicate. Any public communication, be it print media, broadcast media, websites, billboards, transit advertising, course syllabi, or sponsored Little League uniforms, requires resources in the form of time, money, and influence to produce. So do events such as halftime shows, religious rituals, initiation ceremonies, funeral services, and graduation ceremonies. We might argue, then, that much of the communication content to which we are exposed is a product of individuals and organizations with the power and resources (however defined) to communicate.

While the Internet and social media may have democratized global communication to a degree, it remains true that your ability to “tweet” or maintain a web presence is based on the fact that you have the resources to do so. Your presence on the Internet reflects a communicative power that those on the other side of the “digital divide” do not have.

Critical perspectives are designed theoretically to question the notion of objectivity and to address social problems or inequalities in such a way as to provide more equitable access to society’s collective resources. Critical scholars analyze communication with a view to determining whose voices are dominant in any given communication, the power structures behind the observed communication, and how communication is used by those in power to maintain the status quo.

In this section, we will revisit some of the research approaches outlined in this chapter from a critical perspective.

From a critical perspective, the analysis of rhetoric seeks to establish how communication is used to maintain power relationships. The three rhetorical settings identified by Aristotle are formal settings for debate in any society—legal/judicial proceedings, ceremonial proceedings such as graduation, and deliberative proceedings such as political or policy debates. Rhetorical analysis can be understood from a critical perspective as an analysis of the argumentation to win the assent of the powerful or how the powerful use argumentation to maintain their status. Similarly, Kenneth Burke’s dramatistic analysis and narrative analysis can be understood as ways of understanding dramas and stories that tell of power relationships and the clash of values.

From a critical perspective, metaphor analysis can reveal how language maintains and promotes organizational power structures. For example, suppose you are reading interview transcripts and documentation with a view to understanding why an organization is successful. As you read, it occurs to you that certain words and phrases appear repeatedly—team, team player, plays, leader, goals, scored, captain, time out, rules, coach. It occurs to you that even though individual informants have not used the term game or contest, it appears that they are collectively viewing their organizational life as a game or contest. They would probably agree that there is a “captain” coordinating players, each of whom has specific responsibilities; an agreed set of rules; and an overall objective to beat other teams playing the same game. In other words, there is a root “team” metaphor framing their thinking and perhaps shaping their behavior.

At one level, this metaphor implies a group of people working in harmony and coordinating their efforts toward a common goal. However, a critical analyst will point out that the team metaphor is capable of a second interpretation, and that is that teams are hierarchical, with a captain and/or coach in charge and making the strategic decisions. Team members are expected to implement these decisions at a tactical level and to put their individuality aside for the good of the team. Members who persist in being individualistic at the expense of the team risk being thrown off the team for not being team players. From a critical viewpoint, then, the team metaphor promotes a message of obedience to authority, doing as one is directed, and maintaining the team’s hierarchy.
From a critical perspective, this is obedience not just to any authority but to authority rooted in historically identifiable forms of social, economic, or cultural power, which restrict participation by groups such as the disenfranchised.

Similarly, a critical interpretation may be made of the “family” metaphor, common to many institutions. Family may suggest a caring group of individuals with close personal relationships, but families regardless of size, structure, or level of democracy most often have a head or heads (parents) making decisions that others (children) are expected to abide by. In a critical view, the family metaphor, as with the team, subtly promotes the notion of hierarchy and respect for authority.

With respect to organizational communication, the critical interpretation of such metaphors gains some additional validity in that the metaphors are typically found in new-employee materials, employee newsletters, recognition events, and the like. Who controls the content of such employee communications? Management!

In the case of narrative analyses, let’s revisit the IBM story outlined above under “Narrative Analysis” and its interpretation. While the story emphasizes that all members of the organization are subject to its rules, Mumby (1987) interprets the story as having a political function. A surface reading omits the fact that the rules are made by management, not by employees. Furthermore, the story has the rule being enforced by a low-level employee, from “the bottom up,” not the “top down.” From a critical perspective, this story serves to remind employees that they are the ones responsible for enforcing the rules that management has decided on—a story that is made all the more powerful because it is painlessly propagated in the organization as a story, not as a directive from management.

The above analyses are informed by a Marxist perspective, which begins from a critique of capitalism and its attendant social relationships and values. From this perspective, critics examine communication content for the (often hidden) messages that reinforce the ideology or vision that guides those in power. A critical organizational scholar might, for example, analyze employee newsletters to determine the extent to which a management ideology dominates the content.

Feminist criticism generally seeks to critique patriarchal hierarchies and ideologies and, in the context of communication research, the communication content and practices that reproduce and perpetuate such hierarchies and ideologies. Feminist criticism focuses on gender, and more specifically gender inequities and their portrayal, lived experiences, and replication. Critical approaches may range from determining the relative dominance of male versus female “voices” in media content to identifying sexism in language to analyzing such perceived masculine concepts as hierarchy. Media researchers, for example, would take an interest in how the relationships between men and women are portrayed in entertainment media, advertising, or employee communications and more specifically the power relationships between male and female characters; how male and female roles are defined; and how behaviors and roles perpetuate patriarchal behaviors and hierarchies in organizations and interpersonal relationships.

We met one example of such research in Chapter 1, with Chapman’s (1979) study of advertising and psychotropic drugs and his conclusion that women portrayed in advertising were shown in a narrow range of “housewifely” roles, thus perpetuating the stereotype of woman as housewife.

Critical discourse analysis aims to explore the relationships between language and power. As you will have gathered from this section, one assumption we can make about society is that societal elites and the powerful have the ability to interpret and describe the world in a way that favors them and that implicitly or explicitly marginalizes minority voices. The basic aim of critical discourse analysis, then, is to uncover the ideological assumptions behind public discourse and to
link communication content with underlying power structures. The interest of the critical analyst is in injustice and inequality. In examining discourse in this light, the researcher may look for taken-for-granted assumptions, the use of evidence, style, the use of rhetoric, the type of medium used, the ways in which text and graphics interact, and omissions—what is not said as much as what is. Because the discourse of the powerful may be countered by minority discourse, the critical discourse analyst may study both in order to see how one influences the other.

Unlike the content analyst who takes a primary interest in the frequency with which words occur, the critical analyst will take an interest in the words and phrases thought to be significant in promoting a viewpoint, not in their frequency.

The purposes and methods for analyzing media content often overlap. For example, content analysis may be used to obtain a critical reading of advertising, and critical methods may be used to assess the effectiveness of advertising. Different methodologies may also be combined. See, for example, Holsanova, Holmquist, and Rahm (2006), in whose research a semiotic analysis of newspapers was combined with eye-movement scans of newspaper readers.

Ethics Panel: Research as Manipulative Practice

This chapter has discussed approaches to research that focus on persuasion, argumentation, and the maintenance and shaping of relationships through communication. From a critical perspective, we can see that any and all of these approaches can reveal communication in the service of power and of power relationships.

The notion of communication research as manipulative has both theoretical and practical support. For example, Parker (1972) posits that most human relationships are manipulative and that rhetoric and argumentation fall under the “umbrella” of manipulation, along with political power, authority relationships, physical force, and rewards and punishments. Parker (1972) uses the term manipulation in an “ethically neutral sense” (p. 73). Nonetheless, from a critical perspective it is difficult not to see that research participants are manipulated into becoming participants and that research has a power component in that researchers use their research activities if not for social change, then certainly for personal advancement.

This critical view of research is evidenced by what we know of some research in practice. For example, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest that behind the myths of “researchers practicing universal informed consent, consistent empathy, honest disclosure, accurate reporting and unobtrusive observation . . . are the harsh realities of improvised consent, mutual dislike, strategic deception, creative reconstruction and intentional shaping of events” (p. 140).

Where the stakes are high, for example with respect to funding or being first to publish, research can be seen as a “winner-take-all game with perverse incentives that lead scientists to cut corners, and, in some cases, commit acts of misconduct” (Zimmer, 2012).

What has all this to do with the approaches outlined in this chapter to understanding communication content? From a critical perspective, documents that seek institutional review board approvals or funding, propose projects, solicit research participants, and report research findings, conclusions, and recommendations can all be regarded as manipulative. Research writing is not neutral, as we shall further discover in Chapter 14.

Thinking of communication as persuasion and the exercise of power, answer the following questions.
Questions

- What persuasive appeals might a researcher use to obtain funding for research on each of the following?
  - Effects of fast-food advertising on children’s food preferences.
  - Communication behaviors that strengthen and weaken marital relationships.
  - Communication behaviors that facilitate the integration of new immigrant groups into society.

- For each of the above research topics:
  - How might the appeals for funding to government agencies, private foundations, and citizen activist groups differ in order to increase their effectiveness?
  - What persuasive appeals might a researcher use in letters explaining the research and soliciting the participation of individuals in the research?

- What persuasive appeals might a researcher use to obtain the consent of parents to have their children participate in a study of fast-food advertising?

- If a research project is feasible only because of the participation of volunteers, should each volunteer be acknowledged in the final research report?

- Do the researcher’s responsibilities end at publication? Suppose, for example, a research project results in a recommendation to end a program that helps some but not most of the participants in the program. What responsibility does the researcher have to those affected?

RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

Qualifying Individual Influence on Social Networks

More than 1,800 million people worldwide use online social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn (Tech Cocktail, 2012). Today, nearly four in five active Internet users visit social networks and blogs, and Americans spend more time on Facebook than they do on any other website (Nielsen, 2011).

The existence of social networks has clear implications for marketing and communications professionals. Traditional communication strategies based on reaching targets with general, collectively appealing messages have quickly become obsolete. The individual has gained in prominence as segmentation techniques and business analytics tools offer the opportunity to tailor offerings and messaging to each individual. Stakeholders and influencers can now address their praises and concerns directly to the organization involved, which means companies must now have a structure in place should they want to engage in a constructive dialogue.

This change in the model of communication—from mediated to direct—means that companies need to change their traditional ways of action and adapt to the new, more participative online environment. They need a successful social media strategy with three essential phases:

(Continued)
• Listening: The organization must "listen" to what is being said in the blogosphere about itself and identify the key actors in those conversations, those who can—positively or negatively—influence its market and publics. During the "listening" stage the organization needs to answer some basic questions: Who are the most relevant online influencers on the company-related topics? Who are the individuals with whom the organization should establish an online relationship as a priority? Who else is talking about the organization and could affect public perceptions of it?

• Participation: For corporations it is critical to be part of online conversations, particularly with those individuals who are key influencers in the buying process or in creating public opinion about the corporation’s brand, products, or services. Corporations must adapt their tone and messaging to the blogosphere, and create a specific organizational structure to do so.

• Leading: Once the organization has become a recognized actor in the blogosphere and has strengthened its relations in the online world, it can enjoy the benefits of the relationships built with many of the influencers. It will be recognized as a trusted member of the online community and can lead on relevant topics and issues.

How Research Helps Make Business Decisions About Social Media Use

The communications department of a leading technology company in Spain decided to analyze its 2.0 environment in order to identify the individuals and online communities that were or potentially could exert a higher influence on public perceptions of the company. The final objective was to keep influencers informed about the company’s key business strategies and persuade them to share those with their circles of influence, both in the real and in the virtual world.

To address the first phase of its social media strategy ("Listening"), the communications department conducted an overall scanning of the blogs, forums, and social networks being published in Spanish to identify and rank the most relevant sites and bloggers. For this exercise, several content analyses tools were used, such as Radian6, Google Blogs, Technorati, BlogPulse, IceRocket, and BoardReader. The team focus was on five of the key business topics for the company in order to identify the most active individuals talking about such topics. The research combined social media filtering tools such as the ones mentioned above as well as a manual process with members of the communications team validating the content identified by the filtering tools—which at the time still lacked a certain degree of accuracy—to identify, analyze, and classify content.

Results of this online scan and content analyses included a compilation of public data about the most relevant blogs and influencers as well as a graphic representation of the reach of their individual networks and the degree of influence they exerted online.

To determine the degree of influence of each influencer who was identified, the number of followers each had was considered, but the communications team also undertook a qualitative analysis of those followers. That is, the qualitative relevance of each individual’s network to the organization’s objectives was more important than simply taking into account the total numbers of followers (many of whom may not have had any interest in the company). The Klout score—an index that measures the breadth and strength of an individual’s online influence—was taken into consideration, but other aspects such as offline activities and roles of the individual followers (e.g., if one was a leading member of an association or a business institution) were taken into consideration also.
At the conclusion of this research, the company had a precise map of online influencers whose comments and opinions could affect not only public opinion about the company, but also the buying pattern of some of its clients.

As a result of these analyses, the company put in place several actions. For example, it created an interdisciplinary team of marketing and communication professionals to coordinate and execute the company’s social media strategy, and more resources were aligned toward execution of social media tactics, including a major involvement of the marketing and public relations agencies.

Some of the immediate actions included the design of a social media dashboard where the communications team members could see at a glance all the content being published about the company and its industry in the online media, on blogs, and on Twitter. The communications director assigned more resources to dynamize the company’s Twitter account by engaging in existing conversations, fostering dialogue around new topics, and attracting new, qualified followers.

The company also undertook an internal analysis to identify who in the organization could best establish direct relationships with some of the influencers identified. Since some of the topics being discussed in the online communities were of a technical and/or professional nature, it was advisable that the relationship be led by the technical or professional sides of the company—while the communications department could act as information broker of those relationships.

A few months later, a deeper analysis using social media analysis tools such as SocialBro and TweetReach was conducted on the company’s Twitter site to verify the quality—in terms of online and offline influence—of the company’s followers on that site.

Individuals with an existing relationship with the company’s Twitter account (both “followers” and those “being followed”) were first identified and labeled as “influencers” or not. Once identified, influencers were classified on the basis of those who already followed the company on Twitter and those who did not (but who were being followed by the company). Another variable considered was if they were members of any media or think tank organization (e.g., journalists) or not.

This phase of the research concluded that there were several individuals who—although great influencers—were not following the company’s Twitter account. A combined online and offline campaign was designed to reach them. This included following their personal activity on Twitter so as to retweet and respond to their posts—calling, therefore, their attention and becoming relevant to them—as well as inviting some of them to personal briefings and on-site events where face-to-face interaction made possible further online communications with many of these actors.

Full citations for the articles referenced in this case study are listed under “References” at the end of this chapter.

Contributed by Alfonso González-Herrero

Dr. González-Herrero is a corporate communication professional and a faculty member of the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos in Madrid, Spain.

Twitter ID: @aglezherrero
CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Rhetorical analyses examine content to understand the nature of persuasion and argumentation.
- Narrative and discourse analyses focus on stories and their uses.
- Conversation analyses examine the details of human interaction to determine how conversations are coordinated among participants.
- Semiotic analyses focus on the meanings and interpretations of texts and signs.
- Critical analyses focus on the use of language as it promotes and maintains power in organizations and societies.

KEY TERMS

Act
Adjacency pairs
Affiliative responses
Agency
Agen
Aristotelian analysis
Conative
Critical discourse analysis
Disaffiliative responses
Discourse
Discourse analysis
Dispreferred responses
Dramatistic pentad
Emoticon
Expressive
Fantasy theme analysis
Feminist criticism
Ideology
perspective
Master analog
Master narrative
Metalingual
Metaphor analysis
Narrative analysis
Phatic
Poetic
Preference organization
Preferred responses
Purpose
Ratio analysis
Referential
Repair mechanisms
Rhetoric
Rhetorical analysis
Root metaphors
Sanctioning agent
Scene
Semiotic function
Semiotics
Symbolic convergence
Transitional relevance place (TRP)
Turn constructional unit (TCU)
Turn taking
Utterances

APPLICATION EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Discourse Analysis

You will find competing discourses frequently in local and national news media. Often, the issue will be an environmental one as conservationists and historians compete with developers and investors over the proposed use of a historic or an
environmentally important site. Generically, the two competing discourses are likely to be jobs and economic growth versus nurturing and maintaining the local environment and its history. Another contested discourse especially at election time is the place of government in society, for example the discourse of freedom and individual enterprise versus the discourse of care and fair treatment for all citizens.

Identify one such current discourse conflict and outline the media you would study and specific techniques you might use to differentiate the competing discourses, and decide which is the most powerful.

Discourse analysis is frequently done with dominant and minority discourses already identified. How could you predict from discourse analysis which of two competing discourses is likely to become the dominant one?

Exercise 2: Matching Method With Interest

Which of the methods outlined in this chapter would you prefer for researching the following interest areas? Why?

- Identifying the political agenda, if any, of a newspaper or television network.
- Identifying the agenda of management in internal organizational media.
- Explaining how a group typically makes its decisions.
- Explaining how two people typically make a decision.

Exercise 3: Analyzing Organizational Stories

Stories about organizations are frequently told informally to new members of organizations. Whatever the motivation behind the storytelling, the stories often have the effect of explaining how to survive in the organization and identifying the informal rules that members need to follow if they are to adjust successfully.

Identify stories that you and others heard during the first year of study at your institution. How do these stories differ from each other? What topics do they cover that are not addressed by the official student handbook or institutional policies? Which of the approaches identified in this chapter do you find the most useful for understanding these stories as a way of orienting newcomers to the institution?

RECOMMENDED READING

Aristotle


Bormann


Burke


**Conversation Analysis**


**Discourse Analysis**


**Semiotics**


**RECOMMENDED WEB RESOURCES**

Daniel Chandler, University of Wales, Semiotics for Beginners: http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem11.html. This site provides an introduction to semiotic analysis plus a glossary, references, and recommended readings.

Professor Charles Antaki’s Conversation Analysis Tutorial: http://www.staff.lboro.ac.uk/ssca1/sitemap.htm. This site provides an introduction to conversation analysis plus examples of transcripts and notations.

Qualitative Data Analysis on the Web: http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk. This site from the School of Human & Health Sciences at the University of Huddersfield provides qualitative data analysis methods, resources, and a glossary.

Signo: http://www.signosemio.com. Check out this site for more information on theoreticians such as Jakobson.

TalkBank: http://www.talkbank.org. At TalkBank you can find downloadable conversation analysis transcripts linked to audio or video recordings, and other resources.

Umberto Eco Website: http://www.umbertoeco.com. Eco is a semiotician, literary critic, and novelist, popularly known for his novel *The Name of the Rose,* among others. Check out his website on semiotics.
**REFERENCES**


**STUDENT STUDY SITE**

Visit the student study site at [www.sagepub.com/treadwell2e](http://www.sagepub.com/treadwell2e) to access the following materials:

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- Recommended Readings
- eFlashcards
- Study Questions