

# The contribution of linguistics towards transdisciplinarity in organizational discourse

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**ABSTRACT.** This article focuses on the potential of linguistics to produce mode-2 knowledge in organizational discourse (OD) as a field of study. Mode-2 knowledge, the article explains, is an organization's means to perform more productively. The realization of this potential, the article argues, rests with both linguists and organizational scholars. Linguists can contribute by informing organizational scholars of the merits of post-classical linguistics which has been increasingly adopting a transdisciplinary perspective through viewing language as integrated with society and world knowledge. Organizational scholars, on the other hand, can contribute by changing their attitude towards linguistics from perceiving it as vague, chaotic and resistive to accepting it as reliable, orderly and supportive. However, to a large extent, the article suggests, the "marriage" between linguistics and OD is, inevitably, a political issue.

**KEYWORDS:** *Cultural Linguistics, Knowledge Production, Mode-2 knowledge, Organizational discourse, Transdisciplinarity*

Changes in society, the sciences and technology have induced a significant shift in knowledge production, in the sense of both what knowledge is being produced and how knowledge is being produced. While traditional forms of knowledge production referred to as mode-1 knowledge are disciplinary, homogenous, hierarchical and dictated by the interests of academic communities, the new production of knowledge, or mode-2 knowledge, is transdisciplinary (generated in context of application, possessing its own distinct theoretical structures, methods and modes of practice, which may not be locatable on the conventional disciplinary map), heterogeneous (bringing together multiple skills and experiences, involving multiple sites of knowledge production and differentiating at those sites), and heterarchical (changing, not following a predefined system of knowledge organization) (Nowotny et al., 2004; Gibbons et al., 2005; Polimeni, 2006; Pohl, 2008). Because the production of mode-2 knowledge involves more

actors (not necessarily scholars), and because demands for institutionalization are reduced, mode-2 knowledge is more dispersed and transient and, in turn, more socially contextualized. Mode-2 knowledge is too more socially accountable and reflexive in that it shows how social practices, for example, knowledge production and discourse, are mirrored back to social actors.

A field of study in which the need to transform from mode-1 to mode-2 is being felt very strongly is organizational discourse (OD): research into the “structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual representations and cultural artifacts) that bring organizationally related objects into being as these texts are produced, disseminated and consumed” (Grant et al., 2004). Social pressures upon OD are being exerted by corporations which, under the influence of globalization that supports drawing knowledge from a wider range of sources, are forced to constantly innovate (Holden, 2002; Gibbons et al., 2005; Fox, 2006b). Corporations keep seeking for new specialist knowledge which generates massive competition in knowledge production and increases corporations’ awareness of the importance of producing mode-2 knowledge and applying that knowledge to meet their practical needs. Indeed, the most evident examples of the “erosion of the demarcation” between traditional and non-traditional knowledge institutions come, in fact, from the corporate world: high-technology companies, management consultancies, think-tanks, and corporate universities (Nowotny et al., 2004). Gradually, a corporation’s role as a knowledge producer has become just as important as its role as a knowledge consumer. Cognitive pressures are coming from the academic community, notably from OD scholars’ growing awareness of the necessity for the continuous interweaving of the many disciplines involved in OD and for establishing dialogue among those disciplines, which is resulting in specific configurations of knowledge within OD.

Not unexpectedly, the development of OD as a field of study gives rise to various understandings and interpretations of the discourse of organizations. To a large extent these understandings are a result of researchers’ disciplinary backgrounds, each of which introduces into OD certain theoretical structures and methodologies. This means, then, that OD is not just about researching the discourse of organizations, it is also about researching the applicability of theoretical structures and methodologies taken from various

fields of study affecting OD. Placed within the context of OD's transformation towards mode-2, knowledge about these theoretical structures and methodologies becomes a priority.

This article discusses the contributability of linguistics to the production of mode-2 knowledge in OD as a field of study. If we think of discourse in organizations as "texts... that bring organizationally related objects into being", that is, as language in social action, then this view necessitates a theoretical language-accommodating perspective which is offered by linguistic theories. Let us, for example, take a CEO's statement in a media interview: "So I sent the directive that I was in charge". Most people are able to understand the direct meaning of this statement which is the demonstration of CEO's formal power. Linguistics, however, aims to analyze this statement as an act of indirect communication, and so provides empirical evidence for both the position of this statement in society and the way that position is built on social relationships, social situations, social processes, and social roles.

The article continues with an overview of the development of OD as a field of study. Section two offers a perspective on the position of language and linguistics in OD. In section three the contributability of linguistics and some of its subdisciplines to OD is explained. Section four discusses the benefits arising from linking linguistics and its subdisciplines to OD. The concluding section elaborates on the future of linguistics in OD.

## **I. Emergence of OD**

When Peters and Waterman in their 1982 bestseller *In Search of Excellence* stated that a "true people orientation (within an organization) can not exist unless there is a special language to go with it", they forecast one of the most powerful trends within contemporary research into organization: a focus on language and discourse. By the early 1990s a number of organizational researchers had started to view language and discourse as carriers of important social functions in organizations: for example, gaining supporters within an organization (Storey, 1992), affecting organizational change (Boje, Dennehy, 1994), masking reality of a managerial prerogative in the service of capitalism (Sisson, 1994) and hyping human resource management to serve "managerial triumphalism" (Legge, 1995).

As a consequence of the growing importance of corporations in contemporary society (Balmer, 2004) and general acknowledgement of that importance<sup>1</sup>, the collections of texts corporations produce, disseminate and offer for consumption, have gained paramount social significance: they are seen as both shaping the social reality of an organization and, to a great extent, the reality of a corporation's social environment. Because corporations interact within a socio-economic order which is essentially "discourse-driven" (Fairclough, 1999; Chiappelo, Fairclough, 2002), they increasingly view their competitiveness in the area of corporate public discourse as an absolute priority. Of course, attaining (and maintaining) discourse excellence is not easy. In today's detraditionalized<sup>2</sup> societies corporations have to compete in what Coupland (2003a) refers to as a "performance space": a gap between communication to produce "traditionally-structured social meanings" (defining speakers' memberships of social classes, groups and networks) and communication serving (and resulting from) increasingly important self-identification processes in the public sphere. Those corporations which manage to "rework" traditional communicational resources in a new way will occupy that space most productively. In everyday life, corporations' awareness of the importance of their public discourse is visible in a growing demand for corporate communication experts and consultants, in institutionalizing the importance of communication by creating departments and positions within an organization's structure, and, not least, in the steeply growing budgets allocated to organizations' public communication.

No doubt, interest in the "intentionality" of language in an organization was a product of the linguistic turn: a view of language as structuring human cognition and performing human activities. Founded on the idea that there is no reality outside language, developed by a number of great thinkers, for example, Derrida, Heidegger, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, the linguistic turn induced social scientists to approach socio-cultural phenomena through language, and address epistemological problems as "problems dependent upon problems about language" (Roy, 1998).

While the linguistic turn itself was conceptualized in the 1930s, it was Richard Rorty's much celebrated book *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method* (1967) that legitimized the name linguistic turn and institutionalized the related set of views as one

1. Over the past two decades, social attitudes towards both corporations and their products/services have dramatically changed. While the salience of a nation state keeps decreasing, the general perception of a corporation's importance as a key source of "wealth, income and social standing" has been on the increase (Morgan, 1990)

2. Contemporary society is typically "post-traditional" in the sense that tradition, involving collective memory, ritual and "formulaic" truth, no longer exerts control over society and thus is not decisive for the generation of either personal or collective identities (Giddens, 1994)

3. Post-structuralism is perhaps best defined as a set of theoretical positions taken as a reaction to structuralism. The chief principle of structuralism which states that functions of the structure (language) determine each other without recourse to extralinguistic facts (e.g., society), and that social functions of language are therefore irrelevant to language structure, became to be seen as one of the great flaws of structuralism (Beaugrande, 1997). Using structuralism as a “starting-point and counterpoint for programmatic turns, revisions and mutations” (p. 63), post-structuralism foregrounded the problems of understanding and interpreting language and discourse by questioning the very possibility of determining “meaning”, “truth” or “reality” (p. 64). Thus post-structuralism significantly contributed to the realisation of the fact that language and social man are a unified conception that needs to be understood and investigated as a whole (Halliday, 1978)

of the key intellectual paradigms of the late 20th Century.

Within organizational studies, the linguistic turn, more specifically, poststructuralism<sup>3</sup> and its view of language as social action, provided for a radical “rethinking” of the organization and its “interactionally formative processes” (Deetz, 2003). Affecting organizational analysis both on the level of the analysis itself and on the level of fieldwork, where linguistic data are generated (Alvesson, Kärreman, 2000), the linguistic turn has enticed a “critical textual study” through which social issues in the workplace context can be made explicit (Faber, 2006).

Admittedly, though, it was not only the linguistic turn that motivated organizational scholars to direct their attention towards language and discourse. They were too disillusioned with many of the mainstream theories and methodologies fundamental to organizational studies and felt the need to find alternative ways of understanding an organization (Grant et al., 2004). A research focus on organizational discourse which increasingly started to be seen as the “principle means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are” (Mumby, Clair, 1997), provided the welcome solution.

Today, organizational scholars view corporate communication as an “ongoing dialogue with a wide spectrum of constituents both within and outside the corporation” (Balmer, Greyser, 2004) and a corporation’s discourse as a process of shaping and managing an organization (Grant, Hardy, Osrick 1998; Grant et al., 2004). Simply, for the organizational researcher, the organization *is* discourse. It is therefore perhaps not unexpected that the body of research related to the discourse of organizations has exploded, in terms of both the number of researchers involved and the variety of topics investigated. Presently, there exists hardly an aspect of organization that has not been studied as embedded in language and discourse.

## 2. Language and linguistics in organizational research

The emergence of OD as a field of study created a radical change of attitude by organizational scholars towards the role of language in organizations: researchers strengthened their focus on the domains of language in organizations, on related methodological and epistemological issues, and on the possibility of applying such theories

to organizational phenomena (Grant et al., 2004). These “more critical and philosophically grounded” studies of organization underscored the centrality of language and discourse, thus acknowledging the linguistic turn in organizational studies (Deetz, 2003).

Nonetheless, creating a theory of language and discourse in organization has been neither easy nor speedy. Whereas organizational communication had been researchers’ (and practitioners’) concern from the very beginnings of organizational research, language, as *the* medium of that communication, and linguistics as a set of underlying theories indispensable to creating language-related knowledge tended to be overlooked (Westwood, Linstead, 2001; Fox, Fox, 2004; Dhir, 2005). An early reference to the absence of a link between organizational studies and language (and linguistic) issues can be found in Nigel Holden’s 1987 survey of mentions of language topics in a corpus of 463 English-language texts on international management, business and marketing. A very small proportion of surveyed texts, Holden found, referred to language issues and none to language theory. When mentioned, language topics were handled with “perfunctory brevity and frequent ignorance of linguistic fact” (1987).

The true value of Holden’s research lies in the fact that he was the first to provide evidence for the tendency of organizational scholars to take language (and linguistics) for granted. There is, of course, nothing surprising about this: people are generally inclined to believe they “know” about language simply “because they use it all the time” (Corder, 1973) and are familiar with it from childhood “in a practical unreflecting manner” (Lyons, 1995). What, though, we should always bear in mind is that such informal beliefs about language, precisely because of their lack of explicitness and logical form, are not only non-scientific but often can stand in the way of objective examination of language.

Today, despite the steadily increasing number of linguists involved in OD as a field of study and despite a growing awareness of linguistics being at least equally important to organizational studies as, for example, sociology, political sciences and psychology (Wodak, 1997; Fox, 1999; Dhir, Savage, 2002; Tietze et al., 2003; Dhir, 2005), the analysis of organizational discourse tends to be undertaken in a sociological tradition, treating text as a window into human experience and less in a linguistic tradition, treating texts as an object of analysis in itself (Ryan, Bernard 2000). Indeed,

the majority of contributions to OD come from authors (journals and publishers) whose disciplinary background is in organizational studies and fields generally perceived as related to it: besides sociology, these are sociopsychology, the theory of communication, and behavioural studies. Quite commonly, in many OD writings which claim to draw on the “linguistic tradition”, linguistic theories and methodologies are hardly ever referred to, an insight into a particular language and discourse issue is rarely offered, and the treatment of linguistic-based theoretical concepts, for example “language”, “discourse”, “text” and “genre”, which could be employed to provide perspectives on processes and practices in organizations, continues to be rather implicit (Fox, Fox, 2004).

An inevitable outcome of such a “balance of power” is organizational scholars’ continued perception of linguistic theories as (possibly) resistive to organizational studies and, in consequence, the view of linguistics as a non-accredited field of study within OD.

This continues to discourage linguists from researching the language and discourse of corporations which, in turn, lulls organizational scholars into the belief that OD can do without linguistics.

But then again, linguistics itself does not seem to have done much to get accredited in organizational studies. Linguists have always been reluctant to both enter and research organizations (Holden, 1987) and apply linguistic theories outside the traditional areas of language research (e.g., language varieties, language teaching, translation, and similar). For this situation, Coulmas (1997) argues, there is a number of culprits. It was under the influence of Chomsky’s generative paradigm that mainstream linguistics, which in the “heydays of structuralism” was praised for its systematic stringency and, in fact, celebrated as a model for social sciences, turned its back on society and sociology. At the same time, Coulmas further argues, social sciences went “system-theoretic” ways and were slow in building up an interest in language as a constructor of society. So, in reality, the partners-to-be seem to have parted even before they met.

Fairclough, on the other hand, attributes the blame entirely to linguistics, which, as a discipline, is dominated by a “formalism” that “has little time for integrating linguistic analysis into interdisciplinary frameworks”. The unwillingness of linguistics to socialize, Fairclough observes, encouraged social scientists’ perception of text analysis as a process which tends to disregard social and cultural aspects of discourse and often fails its “mediating role” of linking text to

context (Fairclough, 1999a, p. 211).

Coupland too points out that the growing interest of many non-linguistic fields, business studies among others, in language and discourse has not resulted in active interdisciplinarity which might have been expected. On the contrary, Coupland claims, there has been “little awareness or interest” within sociolinguistics in shared research agenda (Coupland, 2001).

Among the tenets popularly attributed to mainstream linguistics which definitely aggravate the dialogue between linguistics and other disciplines, according to de Beaugrande, are the views about language (1) as a phenomenon which is quite distinct from other domains of human knowledge and activity; (2) as a uniform, stable and abstract system in a single stage of its evolution; and, above all, (3) as an entity that should be described at a high degree of generality apart from the conditions of its use (de Beaugrande, 1997). In the early stages of the development of a linguistic theory, these views had strategic importance because they enabled establishing linguistics as a scientific discipline by delimiting it from neighbouring fields (e.g., literature, folklore, philosophy). Within today’s post-classical perspective on language as a social practice which is encountered only in use, and on language as a communicative system which is integrated with knowledge of world and society, such views are outdated and pointless.

### **3. Linguistic theories: contributability to OD**

In the 19th Century when linguistics started to emerge as a discipline, it was no more than a collection of ideas and methods. It took practically the whole of the 20th Century for these ideas and methods to be consolidated, generate a linguistic theory, and link that theory to the realities of life. Today, linguistics is a strictly empirical scientific discipline which operates with “publicly verifiable data obtained by means of observation or experiment” (Lyons, 1995). Empiricity enables descriptiveness (rather than prescriptiveness) which, in turn, makes linguistics non-normative (rather than normative).

The development of the post-classical outlook in linguistics has transformed the view of language as static and ordered to the view of language as dynamic and disordered as integrated with society and its world knowledge, as an entity that should be described along



with the conditions of its use and in terms of the interaction with linguistic, cognitive and social constraints, and, finally, as a dynamic communicative system which undergoes a continual evolution (de Beaugrande, 1997). Understandably, the transition from classical to post-classical perspective is far from simple: the treatment of language and meaning as “eminently *non-classical phenomena*” (italics in original) whose characteristics, for example, connectedness, temporality, locality, and observability, are “exquisitely sensitive to context” will, as de Beaugrande aptly put it, “deprive us of the comfortable authority” to take language for granted as a complete, permanent and well-ordered system, and we shall have to accept language as “sustained by discourse practices” and essentially “messy”, and people’s knowledge about language as equally “messy” (p. 12-13). Contacts of linguistics “proper” with a variety of non-linguistic intermediary fields of study (e.g., anthropology, ethnography, sociology, psychology) which were interested in language phenomena, have created a number of linguistic sub-disciplines. Four of these - sociolinguistics, cultural linguistics, corpus linguistics, and critical discourse analysis - because of their focus on the socialities of language are especially relevant to OD.

### **Sociolinguistics**

In the simplest terms, sociolinguistics studies language in society: the ways language functions in society, the nature of relationships between language and society (its institutions), and the role of individuals and groups in sociolinguistic phenomena. Since every act of communication is socially relevant (in the sense that it is both socially situated and socially situating), many linguists view all linguistics as, in fact, sociolinguistics. When Halliday wrote: “the linguistic system is a sociolinguistic system” (1978), he wished to make clear that researching language functions refers to both studying components of meanings in the language system (the potential) and studying social meanings of individual speech acts (the actual).

Since the early 1970s when sociolinguistics became established as a discipline, it has been applied to language varieties, language and identity, language policy, media communication, and educational issues. Constituting a meeting ground for a range of fields of study, such as sociology, sociopsychology, ethnography and cultural studies, sociolinguistics is seriously aimed at interdisciplinarity. Indeed, an awareness of the link between language and society has

existed from the very beginnings of linguistics. It was Ferdinand de Saussure, often referred to as a “father of modern linguistics”, who by drawing a clear distinction between *langue* (a system, the social side) and *parole* (language use, the individual side)<sup>4</sup>, strongly emphasized the social and institutional character of language. The social relevance of language was the reason why de Saussure viewed linguistics as closest to sociology and social psychology.

Not all linguists, however, have shared the view of language as an act of social behaviour. Chomsky, for example, in his generative theory of language with a focus on language as a system and the “universal grammar”, snubbed the study of language in society as a part of linguistic theory, and referred to linguists’ endeavours to be socially useful as a “fallacy” (Chomsky, 1991). Starting from the assumption about linguistic competence being an innate biological function of the mind, Chomsky saw most of language grammatical structure as arbitrary: not explainable in terms of language functions, the environmental conditions of language acquisition and usage, and the nature of human cognitive processes (Lyons, 1995). What Chomsky failed to understand and which, according to de Beaugrande (1997) is his gravest error, is the fact that many aspects of language do not follow linguistic rules but rather cognitive and social constraints, such as, for example, constraints arising from organization of language as a system and a language user’s knowledge of world and society. The question that one feels compelled to ask is: how a person who has devoted the most of his public life to critiquing the role of various public discourses in manufacturing consent in reproducing power relations in society, could so consistently advocate the idea of language as independent of society? There is only one possible answer: in order to show that natural language can be studied as a formal system, Chomsky, as Halliday (1978) pointed out, needed a high degree of idealization. To attain that, he had to leave out of consideration precisely those variations and distinctions that are related to social context.

At any rate, the key impact of Chomsky’s “asocial” approach was that it for a considerable period of time discouraged researchers from analyzing language as a social instrument used for communicative purposes. Paradoxically, though, with his view of language as a form of individual knowledge/competence, Chomsky did make an (inadvertent) contribution to sociolinguistics. Inevitably, an individualist approach raises the issue of sociolinguistic competence:

4. What De Saussure was not aware of, as Fairclough (1999b) has pointed out, is that the linguistic variation resulting from “parole” is a product of social differentiation, and not of an individual’s choice

a part of linguistic knowledge that involves society, that is, other people (Hudson, 1998).

The variety of research traditions, aims and attitudes which meet in the field of sociolinguistics have given rise to substantial differences in opinions on what exactly is the concern of sociolinguistics, the central question being whether sociolinguistic theory is simply complementary to linguistics proper, an alternative linguistic theory challenging “socially unrealistic aspects” of linguistics proper, an “offshoot” and “intermediary” of humanistic sciences such as anthropology and psychology, or perhaps an independent social theory (de Beaugrande, 1997; Fairclough, 1999b; Stubbs, 1996).

Generally, three positions have been taken in relation to the issue of what constitutes sociolinguistic theory. First, sociolinguistic theory is considered to be a part of linguistic theory, its aim being an improvement of that theory and a deepening of an understanding of the social nature of language. There is however arguments against this view, the main one being that “the very concept of sociolinguistic theory” suggests an “autonomy from the priorities of linguistics” (Coupland, 1998). In other words, the task of sociolinguistics cannot be to make up for the inadequacies of linguistics. On the contrary, Coupland has argued, within sociolinguistics there are several well-articulated theories which do not necessarily link to linguistic theory.

Second, sociolinguistics is viewed as an accumulation of mini-theories (e.g., “face” theory, “accommodation” theory, “network” theory). Although some of the leading sociolinguists (Coulmas, 1997; 2005; Hudson, 1998) have suggested that sociolinguistics should aspire to an independent theory, the diversity of social processes researched within sociolinguistics suggests that a unified theory should not exist within sociolinguistics. The very idea of a unified theory, as Coupland explains, is “ideologically alien” to sociolinguistics precisely because sociolinguistics is based on diversity (Coupland, 1998).

Finally, sociolinguistics is treated as a social theory focusing on the social analysis of language as indispensable to social research. While social theory has not always been interested in language, sociolinguistics has always been engaged with a social theory and has “well-established forebears” in social science (Coupland, 1998). The linguistic turn in social sciences, Coupland reminds us, has rendered social analysis of language, and accordingly sociolinguistics,

indispensable to social research. It is the sociolinguistic theory that has the potential to advance social theory and thus provide the best account of how “people position themselves and their social worlds through language” (p. 116).

It is precisely the multitude of positions - sociolinguistics as a part of linguistic theory, as a set of mini-theories, and as a social theory - that enables sociolinguistics to view an organization's discourse as both a highly specialized knowledge-driven language variety and a dynamic socio-semantic entity which, as any other professional discourse, functions within the context of defined social and historical practices, in this case, in a context of a corporate society. With its many facets sociolinguistics provides a conceptual frame for understanding the complexity of the relationship between the discourse of an organization and society, of the dynamics and tensions in which an organization's discourse is embedded, and, finally, of the social meanings and meaning potentials created through an organization's discourse. To once more refer to the CEO's statement “So I sent the directive that I was in charge”. Viewed from a sociolinguistic perspective, the statement is evidence of the CEO's relationship to society and organization, that is, of the CEO's social position, social class, and social status within a network of social relations.

### *Cultural linguistics*

Within the wide field of modern linguistics, cultural linguistics is formally treated as a branch of cognitive linguistics with a focus on cultural dimensions of language, more specifically, on the way cultural groups express their world view through language.

Language, as we know, is inseparable from culture in the sense that each act of communication constitutes a cultural form which both reflects culture and is constitutive of culture (Palmer, 1996; Palmer, Sharifian, 2007; Saville-Troike, 2003). Language, in fact, is so fundamental that it can be taken as the very heart of the culture (Habermas, 1981; Barthes, 1983). Obviously, an interpretation of linguistic behaviour will not be possible without knowledge of the cultural meanings in which that behaviour is embedded.

While all aspects of culture are relevant to communication and language, those that will have the greatest influence are social and institutional structure, attitudes about language and the importance assigned to language, as well as the ways knowledge about language

is transmitted from one generation to another (Saville-Troike, 2003). In today's corporation, the interdependence of culture and language is best seen in the way corporate management sustains a balance between corporation's discourse and corporate culture by creating, using and maintaining that discourse to control corporate culture and, vice versa, by building corporate culture into a corporation's discourse.

From the perspective of cultural linguistics, the statement "So I sent the directive that I was in charge" can be viewed as built on the ideal of individualism, a central value of contemporary Western culture which treats an individual as a "primary reality" (Bellah et al., 1985).

### *Critical discourse analysis*

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a "cross-discipline", involving, among others, linguistics, sociology, anthropology and cognitive psychology, committed to both the analysis of "the immediate conditions of the situational context" and the analysis of "the more remote conditions of institutional and social structure", or in simpler terms, to the relation between texts, interactions and contexts (Fairclough, 1999b, p. 26). Having arisen out of the context of ideological and political developments since the 1960s, CDA focused on the issues of social dominance or more precisely, the dialectical relationship of language and society, an understanding of discourse as a form of socio-historical behaviour, and a view of power relations as related to discourse (Titscher et al., 2000, p. 146).

By its proponents, CDA is seen as "politically involved research with emancipatory requirement" which means that the precondition of CDA is the usability and practical relevance of its findings (Titscher et al., 2000, p. 164). Indeed, according to Fairclough (1999b), it is critical discourse analysis that provides a "corrective" for a chief weakness of sociolinguistics: a focus on the existence of facts rather than on attending to social conditions which generated those facts. In spite of the many sociolinguists' claims about the active and critiquing social engagement of sociolinguistics (Coupland, 2003b), there have been suggestions that, under the influence of a positivist paradigm in social sciences, sociolinguistics, by taking social facts, such as for example, social class, at face value, has developed an insensitivity "towards its own relationship to the sociolinguistic

orders it seeks to describe” (Fairclough, 1999b). In relating discourse to socio-cultural structures, CDA overlaps with sociolinguistics, cultural linguistics, as well as critical applied linguistics and critical literacy.

Why is CDA fundamental to the research of the discourse of organization? Because it offers a potential “to more broadly conceived social research into processes of social and cultural change affecting contemporary organizations” (Fairclough, 1993). CDA does this by providing methodology for systematic exploration of relationships of causality and determination between (a) corporate discursive practices (communicative events and texts) and (b) social and cultural structures, relations and processes permeating an organization.

Focusing on “why” and “how”, rather than merely “what”, CDA enables researchers to “attend” to social conditions which generated the discourse, such as, for example, the practice of social power. In a contemporary organization that power is practiced not through coercion, but through consent, that is through ideology and discourse (Fairclough, 1999a). Essential to this process are social and cultural values which serve to legitimize a discourse and a speaker. For example, the previously mentioned cultural value of individualism, evident in the statement “So I sent the directive that I was in charge”, enables a perception of the CEO’s character as containing that value, which makes her/him immune to “rational” criticism (Fisher, 1987). So, from the perspective of CDA, the statement “So I sent the directive that I was in charge” represents the CEO’s social, symbolic, cultural and economic capital which he uses to secure “positions of possibility”. Employed as social capital, the statement is evidence of the CEO’s access to and position in social networks. Employed as symbolic capital, the statement is evidence of the CEO’s role in society as a leader. Employed as cultural capital, the statement is evidence of the CEO’s expertise as a manager. Employed as economic capital, the statement is evidence of the CEO’s financial gain.

### *Corpus linguistics*

Directing linguistic research towards a functional and communicative basis of language corpus linguistics put the use of language at the very centre of linguistics. Since the first application of computational text corpora in the early 1960s, corpus linguistics has advanced tremendously and is now employed in all branches of linguistics (on

a corpus-driven approach to the analysis of language use compare, for example, Aijmer, Altenberg, 1991; 2004; Biber et al., 1998; Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; Sinclair, 2004). Generally, the reliance on a text corpus tends to render greater reliability of results in terms of coverage, (quantity of linguistic data described), convergence (ability of a description to produce results) and consensus (linguists' agreement in assessment of description) (de Beaugrande, 1997). Of course, corpus-driven analysis goes beyond counting linguistic features: the patterns found in a quantitative analysis have to be subjected to qualitative interpretation. Because of its focus on language use, corpus linguistics is especially relevant to the aims and goals of sociolinguistics (on the general significance of quantitative study of speech for sociolinguistics compare Hudson, 1998).

So far, for OD research corpus linguistics seems to be among the more attractive linguistic sub-disciplines. Computational text analysis has been applied to various elements and aspects of organizational discourse, for example, CEO's letter (Hyland, 1998), management ergolect (Fox, 1999), business genres (Connor, Upton, 2004), corporate public discourse (Fox, Fox, 2004), a corporation's identity (Fox, 2006b) and a corporation's ideology (Fox, 2006a; 2006c). Through large computerized corpora of authentic texts the researcher is offered a possibility to define/analyze linguistic items and patterns occurring in an organization's discourse. Furthermore, corpus analysis can also reveal new data that a researcher may not have even noticed without the assistance of a text corpus. For example, applying computational analysis to a text corpus compiled of five default corporate genres (mission statement, CEO media interview, business guidelines, media advertisement and annual report) of corporate public discourse, Fox and Fox were able to explore these genres as a virtual system stipulating the potential lexical choices available to all corporations as well as the meaning of those choices in a social context (Fox, Fox, 2004).

Looking to the future, it is a corpus-driven analysis, as de Beaugrande suggests, that might in the end provide empirical evidence as to whether it is more appropriate to view language as "*a single system with the range of internal variations*" or as a "*bundle of related but distinct systems, each constituting one variety*". This new insight, de Beaugrande explains, could in turn prompt researchers to pursue questions about, for example, a range of variation that a language system can sustain, or which aspects of language variation are judged

to be socially significant and by whom (de Beaugrande, 1999). From the perspective of corpus linguistics the statement “So I sent the directive that I was in charge” represents an example of a CEO’s choice of lexical items. Corpus-driven analysis has shown *//me/my/mine* to be the most frequent concept of the CEO media interview (Fox, Fox, 2004). I, as Mead (1962) explained many years ago in his *Mind, Self and Society*, is a form typically used by members of highly developed societies. Through I social actors show their independence of external and internal controls. Through I a person asserts herself/himself and leads social change. Simply, I serves as a locus for a CEO’s most important values.

## 5. Benefits

Together, sociolinguistics, cultural linguistics, critical discourse analysis, and corpus linguistics enable a researcher to view an organization’s discourse from a variety of perspectives (social, cultural, critical), to employ various methodologies (qualitative, quantitative), and so provide a frame for systematic analysis, description, critique and theorizing of the use of language/discourse in organizations. By doing this, the four linguistic subdisciplines provide OD as a field of study with a theoretical rigor needed to produce mode-2 knowledge. Transdisciplinarity emerges from thinking of organizational discourse as language in social action and the need to understand it as language in social action. Heterogeneity emerges from applying a variety of linguistic theories in the research of organizational discourse as language in social action. Heterarchicality emerges from the changed organizational form in OD as a field of study.

Also, which is very important, linguistics is a part of the body of humanistic sciences that are expected to carry meaning for the entire human experience (Gibbons et al., 2005). As such, linguistics is by definition marked by a comparatively high degree of reflexivity. Unlike social sciences which tend to detach themselves from the object of analysis and the process of interpretation, linguistics has a propensity to operate with a minimal distance between the object of analysis (language) and its context (society). This, we know, is essential to mode-2 knowledge production.

Connecting mode-2 knowledge to corporations’ communicational practice, OD can help corporations to more productively occupy



the “performance space”. In result, a further generation of data-driven theories and methods in OD will be encouraged which will ultimately enable a systematic linguistic description of an organization’s discourse as a dynamic communicative system constrained by linguistic rules, the life of the organization and society and, at the same time, integrated with linguistic theory, knowledge of organization, and knowledge of society.

## **6. What next?**

The integration of OD and linguistics, as I hope this article has shown, is a highly complex issue and, inevitably, subject to a number of social developments. First, OD scholars’ willingness to accept linguistics as reliable and supportive to OD (rather than perceiving it as chaotic and resistive) and thus make a decisive step towards a new paradigm of OD research in which linguistics will have the status of an accredited theory. To a large extent, that willingness will be subject to linguists’ ability to make linguistic theories more accessible to organizational scholars by proving the value of linguistics in researching the discourse of organizations. Today, as we know, the majority of contributions to OD come from organizational scholars and are created within the paradigm of organizational studies.

Ultimately, however, both groups’ inclination to enter dialogue will too be contingent on their perceptions of the interests of their respective academic communities. It is known that moves towards mode-2 knowledge, despite the fact that mode-2 supplements rather than supplants mode-1, are often received, at least initially, as challenging the set procedures and views and, consequently, as challenging the legitimacy of mode-1 research, its results, and its creators (Gibbons et al., 2005). So in order to “protect” their academic legitimacy, groups might prefer to adhere to a set of prescribed disciplinary norms which are based on the traditional view of some fields of study as creditable and other fields as not creditable.

Second, the integration of OD and linguistics will also depend on developments within linguistics as a field of study. To fully appreciate the dialectics between discourse and organization and to be able to grasp the discourse of organization along with the conditions of its use, and in terms of its linguistic, cognitive and social constraints,

an OD researcher must accept the post-classical perspective and view the discourse of an organization as interacting with cognition, society and social knowledge. In other words, an OD researcher has to acknowledge the continual evolution of an organization's discourse, allow for contextual differences, reconsider the balance between the freedom of the discourse use and the conventions of the organization and, finally, recognize that all discourse users are a product of defined social circumstances.

Organization researchers' acknowledgment of (post-classical) linguistics as a set of accredited theories and its application to a systemic understanding of an organization's discourse could make linguistics an integral part of metatheorizing OD. This, I believe, would develop through three stages: (1) the study of established theory of OD to produce a better understanding of that theory, (2) the rethinking of the established theory of OD as a prelude to the further development of OD theory, and (3) "producing a perspective that overarches" a part or all of the existing OD theory (on the parameters of metatheorizing compare, for example, Ritzer, 2000). While stage one will deal primarily with the theories underlying OD (e.g., organizational studies, sociology, psychology, etc.) which by organizational scholars have been perceived as supportive and reliable, and therefore accredited, stage two, and especially stage three, will, reach towards theories, such as linguistics, presently treated as resistive, chaotic and therefore non-accredited.

And third, the marketability and commercial value of mode-2 knowledge will, we may expect, by definition positively affect the willingness of organizational scholars and linguists to enter dialogue. In the end, as happens in life, the "marriage" between organizational studies and linguistics, it seems, will be as much a political issue, played out in a field of strategic, personal and academic interests of global markets, corporations, and scholars, as is the issue of the knowledge-production potential of both organizational studies and linguistics.

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## Sintesi

*La linguistica, come insieme di teorie che spaziano dalla sociolinguistica alla linguistica culturale, all'analisi critica del discorso, al corpo linguistico permetterebbe ai ricercatori scientifici di ampliare e sviluppare in maniera approfondita il discorso organizzazionale.*

*La linguistica sviluppa, infatti, il discorso organizzazionale adottando una prospettiva transdisciplinare. La lingua rappresenta un modo efficace per coniugare conoscenza*



*e società. Le sue teorie applicate ad un contesto più ampio, adattate e rese più accessibili per il sapere organizzazionale, potrebbero sviluppare ed integrare prospettive di studio di distinti rami della conoscenza.*

*Mode-2 indica un nuovo modo di produrre conoscenza, non omogenea ma eterogenea, non gerarchica ma eterarchica. A differenza delle forme di apprendimento tradizionali, mode-2 implica relazioni orizzontali di interdipendenza.*

*Il discorso organizzazionale potrebbe svilupparsi attraverso tappe diverse: (1) uno studio delle teorie più accreditate per una loro migliore comprensione; (2) un ripensamento delle stesse teorie come fase iniziale per successivi sviluppi e integrazioni; (3) individuazione di nuove prospettive.*

*La combinazione tra studi finalizzati all'organizzazione e alla linguistica potrebbe collegare contenuti politici, personali e strategici interessi del mercato globale, nell'ambito delle corporazioni e anche della formazione.*

