Numerous disciples across the social sciences and the humanities today take language and linguistic processes as fundamental dimensions for the construction, negotiation and representation of identities. Without attempting to provide a comprehensive overview of research on discourse and identity, *Discourse and Identity* deals with some of the major issues, concepts and approaches characteristic of contemporary studies on discourse and identity. The chapters in this volume explore a wide range of interactional contexts, speech communities and analytical resources.

This volume consists of fifteen chapters organized into four parts. In addition to an overview of the volume and a brief summary of each of the chapters in the book, the general introduction reviews current perspectives regarding the study of discourse and identity. Given that the volume explores these issues in a highly specialized fashion, the overview will be appreciated by non-expert readers. Four major widely accepted approaches to the study of discourse and identity are outlined:

- **Social constructionism**, based on theoretical constructs introduced by Berger and Luckmann (1967) or Hall (1996), regards the conception of identities as processes – rather than products – that take shape in the course of specific interactional occasions, in which ‘discursive work’ serves to negotiate the individual with the social.
Membership Categorization Analysis draws upon previous work by Sacks (1972, 1995) and has led scholars like Antaki and Widdicombe (1998) to conceive of identities as not merely represented in discourse, but rather enacted, performed, and constructed in the course of interactions involving the use of linguistic and non-linguistic resources.

The anti-essentialist vision of the ‘self’, especially in gender studies and in discursive psychology, has greatly contributed to our postmodern rejection of the self as something that people possess and that represents some kind of core essence of the persons’ (p. 3). This anti-essentialist conception of the self permeates both gender studies’ investigation of people’s ‘polyphonic’ and performative identities (cf. Bucholtz et al. 1999), and discursive psychology’s emphasis on the articulation of psychological categories defining the ‘self’ on the basis of social categories and practices (cf. Potter 2003).

Indexicality links speech to extra-linguistic elements through the role of linguistic signs pointing to various aspects of the social context. As substantiated by Hanks (1992), speakers come to incorporate context in an ongoing process involving their construction of positions within a so-called ‘indexical ground’.

Despite such widely accepted scholarly approaches to the study of discourse and identity, much of the scholarly research undertaken evidences some important theoretical and methodological divisions among scholars working in the field, chiefly between Conversation Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. By and large, whereas Conversation Analysis sees identities as locally produced in the course of specific interaction, Critical Discourse Analysis lays a strong emphasis on the constitutive effect of broader political and ideological contexts which both determine and constrain the production of identities in specific interactions. The editors are well aware of this distinction, but what distinguishes this volume from other compilations of work on discourse and identity is precisely that ‘rather than share a single theoretical orientation, contributors come from different traditions and disciplinary domains and use varying tools’ (p. 6), including Conversation Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, as well as others like Narrative Analysis or Interactional Sociolinguistics.

The volume is organized into four parts, each of which includes a short introduction and several chapters. Part 1 (Overview: Theory, method and analysis) comprises four chapters that provide a detailed overview of the theoretical, methodological and analytical perspectives on contemporary research on discourse and identity. This section is opened by Elliot Mishler (Chapter 1), who challenges the validity of ‘clock/chronological’ time as
a scaffolding for the analysis of identity construction in narrative on the
grounds that ‘narrative theory and research requires a narrative/experi-
mental model of time’ (p. 46). Through an analysis of telephone conversations
about medical family matters, Chapter 2 by Blanca Telles Ribeiro investiga-
gates ‘the implicit, dialogic, and multi-layered nature of communication’
(p. 72) by paying attention to (a) ‘voice’, (b) ‘footing’ and (b) ‘positioning’
as interactional processes of contextualization accounting for (a) agency
salience, (b) alignment shifts, and (c) strategic interactional moves respec-
tively. In the third chapter, Alexandra Georgakopoulou delves into story-
telling by adolescent girls to explore how interconnections between local
identities and global identities may be traced through the management
of participant roles, thereby bridging the gap between ‘discourse’ as any
form of language usage above the sentence level and so-called (capital-D)
‘Discourse’ regarding ‘language (as well as, for instance, visual images) as
an element of social life which is dialectically related to other elements’
(Fairclough 2003: 214–215). The last chapter in this section of the volume
dresses the issue of reference in identity-construction processes. Drawing
upon Goffman’s work and linguistic work on reference, Deborah Schiffrin
herein demonstrates how specific referring terms employed in the course
of specific interactions – for instance interviews – may partake of complex
assortments of identities at different levels. In Schiffrin’s view, reference
would thus be essential for understanding ‘how the contextual meanings
of utterances contribute to the social worlds in which we construct our
identities’ (p. 131).

Part 2 (Private and public identities: Constructing who we are) addresses
the role of discursive practices in the construction of identities. Identity
construction and projection are discussed in the five chapters of this section
in terms of their articulation at different levels and by various means, for
example, (a) via the reciprocal positioning of interactants; (b) by narratives
that assume shared stocks of knowledge referring to selves and others; (c)
through the use of categorization devices for ascribing oneself and others
to broader social groups; and (d) by ideological prescriptions imposed
upon social action.

In the first chapter of the section, Robin Lakoff contemplates the
interface between public discourses and personal identity by considering
food consumption and preparation as a form of social practice having an
impact upon ‘minor identities’, which, rather than being central aspects of
individuals’ sense of self (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation), account
for subtle aspects of individuals’ minor identities. Janet Holmes (Chapter
6) uses Social Identity Theory in the workplace to show that interaction-
based negotiations between individual/personal and group/social/
collective roles strengthen a collective sense of self through “relational
practice” (p. 137). Chapter 7 by Liliana Cabral Bastos and Maria do Carmo Leite de Oliveira focuses on conflicts between clients and health insurance companies, and demonstrates the interplay between social-identity presentation and participation in specific institutional contexts. Chapter 8 is similarly concerned with institutional identity in that Greer Johnson uses ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis to show how teachers’ and interviewers’ identities are projected and managed through micro-level conversational resources (e.g., discourse markers, reformulations, etc.). Finally, in the last chapter of Part 2, Susan Bell uses Narrative Psychology (e.g., Gergen and Gergen 1997) for disentangling the interplay between personal-identity construction processes and ideologically laden public discourses in the autobiographical narrative discourse about motherhood and health produced by a ‘DES’ (diethylstilbestrol) daughter.

Part 3, *The gendered self: Becoming and being a man*, provides insights into the discursive construction and negotiation of gender identities in general, and masculinities in particular. All four contributions in this section reveal ‘how male identities are formed discursively vis-à-vis particular hegemonic discourses of masculinity, but also vis-à-vis discourses of heterosexuality and whiteness’ (p. 255). Scott Kiesling (Chapter 10) uses indexicality theory to analyse two stories elicited from fraternity members which give rise to narratives embedded in interview interactions. Identities take shape as situated and performative constructs since speakers’ recourse to specific story features indexes Cultural Models – labelled as capital D-Discourses by Kiesling – via the shared cultural knowledge locally accessed in interaction. In the following chapter, Luiz Paulo Moita-Lopes utilizes positioning analysis to illuminate the simultaneous discursive construction of masculinity, heterosexuality and whiteness in focus groups. By scrutinizing the narratives of a young adolescent within a Brazilian school-based focus group, Moita-Lopez substantiates the re-production of hegemonic gendered identities in the course of narrative interactions whereby individuals come to agentively privilege culturally shared master narratives while handling specific storylines. Closing Part III, Stanton Wortham and Vivian Gadsden’s piece looks into a biographic interview of a working-class, African-American male enacting non-compliance identity positions within dominant discourses on masculinity. By integrating indexicality into an overall positioning theoretical framework for the analysis of self-construction in narrative, the authors succeed in throwing light on ‘the challenges faced by young urban men as they struggle to construct themselves as good fathers in a social context that often impedes good parenting’ (p. 315). In general, the papers in Part 3 use positioning theory to bridge the gap between aspects of the world articulated in narratives and interactional situations where such narratives are locally managed.
Part 4 (The in-between self: Negotiating person and place) considers the relationship between individual identities and socio-historical processes – as well as their ideological counterpart – with a special focus on how individuals (e.g., Holocaust survivors or immigrants) face major life transitions. The section is opened by Anna de Fina (Chapter 13), who is concerned with the discursive construction of ethnicity – particularly the category ‘Hispanic’ in narratives by Mexican immigrants. The author argues that social-categorization contexts largely constrain individual identification processes insofar as social ideologies impinge upon shared social representations. In Chapter 14, Mike Baynham addresses the narrative discourse of Moroccan immigrants in the UK to explore the interplay between narrators’ personal agency and positioning in interview interactions. Inspired by cultural studies and ethnomethodology, Baynham introduces the notion of ‘speaking position’ to characterize ‘social roles, ideological stances, and the interpersonal alignments taken up by speakers in order to perform identities’ (p. 381). Lastly, Brian Schiff and Chaim Noy bring Part IV, and the volume, to an end with an analysis of autobiographical accounts of the Holocaust. The authors take a discourse approach to narrative ‘that regards life story-telling as a meaning making process in which the individual is engaged in a constant reinterpretation of the past within the framework of the contexts in which s/he moves in the present’ (p. 348).

In short, Discourse and Identity brings together fifteen chapters by leading experts in the scholarly field of discourse and identity. Despite the great variety and richness of current approaches to the study of discourse and identity – of which the fifteen chapters are representative – the different contributions place a strong emphasis on a number of questions which may definitely serve as guidelines for pursuing research on discourse and identity. To begin with, based on the assumption that language analysis may not be separated from its usage contexts, the chapters in the book substantiate the importance of analysing the interactional contexts where the use of language gives rise to the emergence of identity. This basic tenet reinforces the premise that identity is not something that speakers actually ‘have’ but rather something that we produce and reproduce through the use of language and other media. As the contributions in the volume demonstrate, this emphasis on the role of language usage in context goes hand in hand with the importance attributed to social practice for understanding how identity emerges in the course of social interactions. While identities may accordingly be conceptualized as being the result of social interaction where language features prominently, the detailed case studies in Discourse and Identity similarly make it clear that identity construction and projection in the course of discursive interaction is part of the social
practice where such interactions – involving the use of language alone or in combination with other media – are embedded. The interactional and local management of social categories and language is thus examined without disregarding the impact of global phenomena upon the management of such local categories.

All in all, although *Discourse and Identity* may be rather too specialized as an introduction for newcomers to the study of discourse and identity, it is still an indispensable guide for scholars from a wide range of fields including linguistics, sociology, psychology, media and communication studies, gender studies or cultural studies, where the study of discourse and identity has become a significant field of enquiry.

**References**


