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A typology of statements about discourse

1. Introduction

Many statements can be made about discourse data, from line-by-line micro analyses to sweeping generalizations about language, culture and society, using a variety of methods and analytic categories. The aim of this article is to present a classification of the types of statements that can be made, in order to clarify some key issues and make explicit similarities and differences across approaches. A higher degree of explicitness about what we say when we describe discourse is desirable in order to compare theories, methods and analytic frameworks (Duranti 2005).

Heated debates often arise not only between those who analyze similar data sets with different categories (more or less social or cognitive, more or less 'critical'), but also between those who prefer to focus on single cases and those who tend to produce far-ranging generalizations, and between those who express such generalizations with or without quantification. The taxonomy presented here is meant to provide a better understanding of these methodological controversies, in order to clarify whether the same type of statement is made in different ways or whether different types of statement are involved altogether. The aim is thus to provide as neutral a framework as possible to compare different approaches with discourse analysis, and not to claim that some statements or some ways of formulating them are better than others.

Defying the prevailing conception that a paper must belong to a particular 'school' (Van Dijk 1996), an attempt will be made to cut across the boundaries between disciplines studying discourse. The very choice of this term may appear problematic to some, who see it as belonging to a tradition called 'discourse analysis' to be distinguished, for example, from 'conversation analysis' (e.g. Wooffitt 2005). The use of 'discourse' made here and appearing in the title, however, does not

imply allegiance to any particular school or methodological orientation, but is to be understood in a neutral, dictionary-like sense - 'connected speech or writing' or 'a linguistic unit (as a conversation or a story) larger than a sentence' (Merriam-Webster).

In fact, despite the appearance of the word 'discourse' in the title, most of the examples come from conversation-analytic studies, simply because I am more familiar with this area. Other examples have been selected from a variety of approaches (including critical discourse analysis, discursive psychology, ethnography, sociolinguistics, speech-act pragmatics), with a preference for classic studies that most readers should know even if they practice different forms of discourse analysis.

The proposed taxonomy will also be applied to a research project on a 5 year-old child's acquisition and use of Italian as a second language (her pseudonym is Fatma). Data were collected naturalistically during her everyday interactions in a nursery school, starting from the very first days of exposure to the second language, and the phenomenon taken as an example are repetitions of words first uttered by others, or 'appropriations'. These data will be discussed here only to illustrate the different categories in the typology and to show that a variety of statements at different levels of generality and interpretiveness can be made within a single study. [1]

2. A typology of statements

The statements that can be made on discourse data may vary along two dimensions – their level of generality and their level of interpretive elaboration. As regards the former, the level of generality increases from individual cases, to collections of several cases representing a single category, to the comparison of such categories among them or across different contexts.

As regards interpretive elaboration, although in what follows it will be operationalized as three discrete levels, one should bear in mind that it is actually a matter of degree. It can be minimal in

the so-called descriptions, in which a phenomenon is simply presented, exhibited. As is well-known, however, descriptions are never entirely neutral, theory-free, but they always involve a degree of interpretation. One may not agree with an ontological reading of Nietzsche's famous sentence 'there are no facts, only interpretations', but it is clear that no fact can be described and reported without making recourse to some level of interpretation, albeit minimal – the very use of metacommunicative terms, whether they come from everyday language or from a specialized terminology, already contains an interpretive element. One should thus speak of statements with a minimum level of interpretation (which we will continue to call, for the sake of simplicity, descriptions) and statements in which interpretation or explanation play a more central role (interpretations in the usual sense of the term).

A third, even more abstract and complex level of interpretive elaboration can be added, again without implying any sharp boundary with the previous one. We might call this level 'theory', with the scare quotes preserved in Table 1 to remind readers of the problematicity of the term. Many authors in fact never use it in connection with their own research, asserting that their analyses are not grounded on preconceived theories, but that they emerge inductively, bottom-up, from a constant engagement with the data. Surely, if by 'theory' one means a set of laws and hypotheses formulated by a community of scientists and to be applied deductively in the observation of reality, it is true that many researchers do not follow any theory. However, 'theory' can also be understood in a weaker and more general sense, following its etymology from Greek *theorein* 'to gaze upon, consider, look at'. In such a sense, any general and systematic way of looking at data might be called a theory, and this is the sense that will be followed here.

To summarize, the two proposed dimensions can be represented with the following table:

[TABLE 1 NEAR HERE]

In what follows, the nine categories resulting from the intersection of these two dimensions will be discussed, following a presentation logic based on the simple principle of moving from smaller units (individual cases) to larger ones (groups of cases and relationships among them).[2] For each of them, examples will be given from the research project on Fatma's second language acquisition and from studies conducted in various approaches.

A caveat is in order. Each of these studies might contain several types of statement, belonging to different cells in the matrix. Thus, sometimes the same study will appear in more than one cell, at other times a study making a variety of assertions will be quoted only once, in relation to the type of statement most salient for our discussion. In sum, the taxonomy's aim is not to classify studies (articles, chapters, books), but statements; not to pigeonhole all published research into watertight cells, but to help researchers reflect on the level of generality and theoretical elaboration of their claims, regardless of whether just one or several such claims are contained in a single publication.

3. Single cases

The individual case represents the minimal level of generality. In fact, statements about single cases are *not* general by their very nature, although more general theoretical and methodological implications may be drawn from them and they can be the starting point for assembling the collections of cases discussed in the second line of Table 1. Furthermore, even the description of a single case contains an unavoidable quota of generality - both specialized and mundane language are 'general' in that the words employed in a specific piece of discourse are understood because they are tokens of some abstract, general types. In other words, the case being described may be seen as completely unique, but the terms used in its description are not, which makes any description to some extent 'general'.

This leads to another important question. 'Whose' terms and categories are employed in the

description and interpretation of single cases and their more complex aggregations in subsequent lines of the table? Some approaches, like conversation analysis and ethnography, insist on using an *emic* approach that strives to portray phenomena from the participants' point of view. However, even in these two traditions *emic* means quite different things (Kasper 2006 :84), and it is not clear how the analyst can be entirely detached from his or her background knowledge and academic orientation to see things 'from inside'. The issue is too complex to be addressed in this article, but it certainly deserves attention and cannot be taken to be solved simply by claiming that one's analyses are 'emic'.

3.1 Description

The minimal interpretive level for reporting a single event is its bare presentation. Despite its being the simplest way of approaching data, it is not trivial and it might be quite informative. In a study on the acquisition of the first or an additional language, or of other communicative abilities, displaying the first occurrence of a certain phenomenon is a noteworthy result, which amounts to showing that after a certain learning period a given type of behavior is possible.

For instance, Fatma was observed to produce repetitions of words directed at her from the very first days of school. In the following example, the girl repeats the question 'what is it?' that Teacher1 had asked her and two of her schoolmates.

Extract 1 (Sept 9)

((Fatma, Ilham and Natalia are piling up some tires in the garden))
Fatma-Ilham: ( ) ((in Arabic))
((Teacher1 comes closer))
Teacher1: Che bello, che cos'è?
How nice, what is it?

Fatma: Che-co-s'è ((chanting the words while she hops away))

What-is-it

Fatma could also appropriate words from conversations she was not involved in, as in the following example recorded six weeks later.

Extract 2 (Oct 23)

((Children are having lunch, sitting at three round tables in the classroom; for each table there are 6/8 children and one adult))

Teacher2 ((at another table)): bimbi, cosa volete di frutta, pera?

children, what would you like for fruit, pear?

(3.0)

Fatma: maestra, pera. maestra: ((turning back towards Teacher2)).

teacher, pear. teacher:

This extract shows that it was indeed possible for Fatma to repeat words that were not directed at her, even when they were produced several meters away

Presenting a single case can also serve as a counterexample to refute a previously made generalization (Duff 2006: 88) or as a deviant case to confirm or challenge the interpretation of a category of phenomena, as is often done in conversation analysis.

The fundamental statement in this cell is thus: '(if X happens), X can happen'. Many studies contain statements of the form 'speakers *can* do this and that' - a single example is enough to ground such claims.

3.2 Interpretation

In this cell, the event is not simply presented and described, but an attempt is made at explaining how it works, using a 'rich' (Geertz 1973) array of categories, points of view, and implications. This amounts to asking some of the fundamental questions of conversation and discourse analysis: 'What is it that's going on here?' (Goffman 1974), 'Why that now?' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). These questions underscore the relevance of the *here* and *now*, which, according to conversation analysis and other approaches, are an obligatory starting point before even considering the possibility of making general claims.

A number of studies based on single cases take this hermeneutic approach. In-depth interpretations of single cases are frequent in Critical Discourse Studies, such as Van Dijk's (2002) socio-cognitive analysis of a speech given by a British MP, revealing its ideological presuppositions. Many conversation-analytic papers also consist in the detailed interpretation of single cases, like Goodwin's (1979) analysis of how a sentence's structure can be explained by reference to the recipients' reactions in the course of its delivery. Ethnography as a whole has been deemed 'science of the particular' (Baszanger and Dodier 1997: 11) and as regards its 'thick description, ... what generality it contrives to achieve grows out of the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions' (Geertz 1973: 25).

Returning to Fatma's repetition of words not directed at her (Extract 2), it could be interpreted as an attempt by a bystander to seek ratification (Goffman 1981). Fatma could also be seen as entering an already open 'vector of activity' (Merritt 1982), that is, a course of action in which others were already engaged. Repeating a key word from that course of action contributes to making her turn linguistically cohesive and socially appropriate, thus increasing her chances of being ratified.

The interpretation of single texts and episodes raises a number of important methodological issues. In particular, one may wonder whether it is possible to judge the quality or validity of interpretations, even to the point of saying that some are downright wrong, or whether one should

rather opt for an 'everything goes' attitude. Although the debate on whether and how it is possible to establish the validity of interpretations has a long tradition in philosophy and literary analysis, the issue is rarely stated in such general terms in discourse studies (but see Bell 2011). Some post-modernists may consider the problem to be completely irrelevant, or at least formulated in terms of an epistemology they refuse (although I am not sure how many of them would straightforwardly subscribe to the 'everything goes' position). However, many others try to identify criteria to defend the validity of interpretations and to define what a good or a poor analysis is. These quality criteria differ widely across approaches, so that an excellent analysis for critical discourse analysis may be seen as problematic by a conversation analyst, and vice versa (see e.g. the exchange between Schegloff 1997 and Wetherell 1998). It is however important to underline that, from the point of view of the present classification, they are the same 'type' of analysis, or, better, analyses at the same level of generality and interpretation.

Theory

Is it possible to build a 'theory' starting from single-case analysis (which is obviously different from the more straightforward case of applying a theory to single cases)? If by theory we mean a set of systematically related general assertions, the answer is certainly no. However, if by theory we mean, etymologically, a certain way of seeing things, a look on phenomena, the development of a set of analytic categories, then we can say that single-case analysis may produce forms of 'theory'.

According to Potter (1997: 147-8), 'a large part of doing discourse analysis is a craft skill ... Conversation analysts sometimes talk of developing an analytic mentality, which captures what is involved rather nicely (Psathas 1990)'. For many discourse and conversation analysts, single-case analysis is the best training for developing this skill and this mentality. In doing so, one also learns a set of descriptive categories that have been developed in previous studies and that can be said to be a discipline's tools of the trade. Learning how to use this analytic terminology, and learning how to

apply it to single episodes, is thus a first step toward the acquisition of a 'theoretical' orientation on data.

4. Collections of cases

We now turn to the second line in the table, which contains statements based on collections of several cases. The observation of an individual event may lead to search for similar cases in the corpus, which may be seen as representing a certain type of action, or discourse structure, or recurrent practice.

4.1 Description

The lowest interpretive level in this line consists in simply assembling a collection of similar events. However, here too a certain degree of interpretation is required - in order to recognize that a number of cases belong to a same type, each of them must be interpreted and understood as equivalent to the others in some respect.

Inclusion in the category may depend on formal, functional or structural criteria. In the first instance, cases with the same form will be collected - for instance, all the tokens of a given linguistic expression such as *yeah* (Drummond and Hopper 1993; Jefferson 1985), *oh* (Heritage 1984, 2002), or *I don't know* (Hutchby 2002; Potter 1997). Examples of functionally-based categories might be a collection of conversational repairs - repairs cannot be identified through a particular linguistic form, but only through their function ('overt efforts do deal with trouble sources or repairables'; Schegloff 2007: 100-101). Likewise, collections of excuses, compliments, personal references and so forth are assembled by recognizing that all the cases play the same discursive function, despite their having different linguistic and behavioral realizations. Cases can

also be grouped based on discourse-structural criteria, for example their position in a sequence (initiating vs responding; following a certain type of move etc).

Schegloff (1996) provides a detailed discussion of how a collection of similar discursive phenomena can be assembled. His starting point is the observation of some speech fragments in which the same type of behavior takes place – at turn beginning, a person repeats verbatim what a previous speaker has just said. This is a formal identification criterion, but the collection was also built using functional and structural criteria - all the repetitions display agreement with the previous speaker, they are placed in a response slot and not in an initiation one (unlike repair initiations repeating a problematic item) and they follow a turn in which the speaker 'is offering a candidate observation, interpretation or understanding of the recipients circumstances' (p. 180).

Using a traditional terminology, we might call this list of criteria an operational definition, allowing one to establish whether a case belongs to the category or not. Although several authors would be reluctant to apply the phrase 'operational definition' to their own research, every time cases are grouped there must be a grouping criterion. Such a criterion may be made explicit by listing a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, supplemented by examples of clear-cut and borderline cases, both of inclusion and exclusion, which help to further clarify the category's boundaries. Dubois and Sankoff (2003: 287) for instance clearly define the 'operational criteria' they used to identify the discursive phenomenon of interest, that is, 'enumerations', which were then counted and submitted to a quantitative analysis within the framework of variationist sociolinguistics.

When quantification is not envisaged, researchers may downplay the importance of providing explicit definitions for their categories, or even refuse to do so, as Edwards (2005: 7) does for his collection of 'complaints', which are said to 'elude formal definition, and remain a largely normative and vernacular, rather than technical, category'. This appeal to vernacular, commonsense understandings of research constructs is problematic, for it may not be clear what the collection

should include and exclude and, ultimately, what is being talked about.

Building collections is a crucial and very complex step in the research process. On the one hand, there is a risk of neglecting its importance by treating 'coding' as a clerical activity that can be performed by anyone in a careless and mechanical way. On the other, over-emphasizing the singularity of individual cases, may make collection-building virtually impossible, or a completely implicit and unaccountable process. Fasel Lauzon (2014) rightly notes that, when the research aim is to identify a conversational practice, building a collection is not a preliminary step, but rather the final point of the analysis. In other words, 'closing' the collection and clarifying the reasons why some instances are included and some are not amounts to providing a clear definition of the practice itself, with an inevitable degree of circularity - "I needed a collection to describe the interactional practice [...], but I needed the description to build up the collection".

The difference between statements in the first line of the table and statements in the second is that the former take the form 'X can happen', while the latter assert 'X happens several times'. This formulation is neutral and uncontrovertible – if four or five examples of X are reported in the publication, this warrants the assertion that X happens more than once.

Problems arise when 'several times' becomes something like 'regularly', 'typically', 'routinely' or a gnomic present like 'speakers do ...'. All these expressions lay some claim to representativeness, as they imply that the examples reported in the publication, and the few more gathered in the research corpus, represent a general phenomenon, a recurrent practice in the universe of discourse. Even the largest collection still remains a tiny sample within the universe it was sampled from, and we are thus led to ask whether our 'examples' are really exemplar of something more general.[3] The problem of sampling is rarely directly addressed in discourse studies, although there are a few exceptions. Duff (2006) for instance discusses the issue of the 'representativeness or typicality of cases selected' in ethnographic research, and Ten Have (2007) does the same for conversation analysis. This also raises the issue of making explicit the number of

cases constituting the corpus. One may state that they are a large number without giving any further details, provide a semi-exact figure (‘sixty or so instances’, Schegloff 1996: 179), or an exact figure like 63.

In my study on Fatma, repetitions of words not directed to the girl were called ‘external appropriations’ (as opposed to ‘internal approprations’ of words addressed to her) and 123 instances were identified in about 20 hours of mealtime conversations during six months. In order to arrive at this exact figure, a list of explicit inclusion criteria was compiled.

4.2 Interpretation

As we said, even assembling a collection of cases implies interpreting each of them as having certain properties in common with the others, so that the difference between the present category and the former is essentially a matter of degree. For assembling a collection one just needs to identify what all the cases have in common; in interpreting the class thus formed more emphasis will be placed on explaining how they work, what their general function is, and the logic behind them.

It might be useful here to return to Schegloff’s (1996) example. After collecting sixty or so instances conforming to the aforementioned criteria (most of which are formal), he asks what is the ‘type of action’ they all perform. His interpretation is that they have the function of ‘confirming allusions’, that is confirming with some emphasis the previous speaker’s formulation of what the other speaker had originally said in a more elliptical or allusive way. This generalizing interpretation is warranted using some procedures typical of conversation analysis, like observing how the structure is employed in different contexts, or considering cases where it is missing or avoided despite its possible relevance.

Potter (1997) illustrates a similar point within a different framework. After having observed how *I dunno* was used in a interview to princess Diana, he assembled a collection of other *I dunno/I*

don't know produced in similar sequential contexts but in different conversations, to arrive at formulating a general hypothesis – in these cases, *I don't know* functions as a 'stake inoculator', that is, it is a way in which 'conversationalists and writers can limit the ease with which their talk and texts can be undermined' (p. 154).

In Fatma's study, this step consisted in identifying a common logic for all the external appropriations. On a general level, external appropriations seem to serve the double purpose of ensuring both linguistic cohesion with what others have just said and social participation to what they are doing. In these cases, Fatma is not directly involved in the on-going interaction; she tries to introduce herself in it to become a ratified participant, which requires gaining the interlocutors' attention. Repeating previously uttered words helps her to be heard as contributing something relevant, on-topic, and increases her chances of being ratified.

In sum, statements at this level of analysis concern the explanation of how communicative practices work, through the identification of their logic and functional specificity. This is also the level at which the micro-macro question begins to arise – a variety of 'micro' episodes are brought together under one 'macro' general explanation.

4.3 Theory

For this type of statements, too, one cannot speak of 'theory' in a strictly hypothetico-deductive sense. At this level, theorizing may mean creating classifications of practices and activities, or repertoires of actions which can guide subsequent analyses. In the ethnography of communication (Saville-Troike 2008), as well as in some analyses of scientific discourse, beginning with the classic Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), the identification of 'communicative repertoires' is seen as one of the fundamental aims of research. Peräkylä (1997: 216), reflecting on his study on discursive practices in AIDS counseling, concludes that 'the results were not generalizable as descriptions of what other

counselors or other professionals do with their clients; but they were generalizable as descriptions of what any counselor or other professional, with his or her clients, *can* do'.

While probably nobody calls this type of achievement 'a theory', some may say that it represents a 'theoretical or analytic capital' (Schegloff 1999: 145) or a form of 'theorizing': 'The results of such analyses [by conversation analysis] cumulated to substantial accounts of singular practices, families of practices, organizations of practice addressed to generic organizational problems in interaction .... I think it not unfair to characterize these results as composing a body of theorizing about the organization of interaction' (Schegloff 2005: 456).

5. Comparison across categories

Stepping up another level in generality, we find statements about how the categories of phenomena identified in the previous section may differ across contexts or from other categories. One might for instance look at how a communicative practice is realized in two different cultures, or in different circumstances, or how it differs systematically from another practice.

Correlational statements of this kind abound in many fields of science and in some approaches to discourse. Conversation analysis, with its 'theoretical asceticism' (Levinson 1983: 295), tends to be rather cautious in this regard. There is in fact a risk of prematurely identifying general categories that may be relevant for the researcher's comparative aims, which are then applied to data losing sight of the specific circumstances in which they were produced. However, even this approach does not exclude the possibility of such systematic comparisons, provided that the analytic categories employed are carefully defined so as to take into account their relevance for participants in their concrete interactions (Schegloff 2009).

Description

The relationship between a discursive phenomenon and another dimension may be simply displayed and described, acknowledging its existence. Cross-cultural comparative studies usually take this form, by noticing how a certain communicative practice varies in different languages and cultures. Stivers et al. (2009), for instance, have observed the delays with which speakers answer polar (*yes/no*) questions in ten different languages. Their results show that speakers of some languages, like Danish, tend to respond slower than the average, whereas Japanese speakers have faster response times. Despite these slight differences in the average response time, the ten languages display striking similarities as regards the correlation between delay time and interactional circumstances. For example, in all languages the delay tends to be shorter if the response is an answer (as opposed to some other linguistic action) and if the answer is confirming rather than disconfirming.

Cross-linguistic comparisons of this kind abound in discourse studies, from the classical works on speech act realization in different languages (Blum-Kulka et al 1989), to those on telephone calls (Luke and Pavlidou 2002) and all the ethnographic accounts comparing ways of communicating in various cultures (Saville-Troike 2008).

This cell also contains the studies comparing communicative practices in sub-cultures within the same country, such as the work by Hein and Wodak (1987) on how patients of different social classes and educational levels interact with doctors. The category further includes discussions about communicative differences between men and women (Kendall and Tannen 2003) or native and non-native speakers (Mackey, Abbuhl, Gass 2012). One may also ask whether some conversational sequences, such as the question-answer sequence, may systematically vary in different contexts, such as spontaneous informal interactions or institutional ones like court hearings or medical consultations (Heritage 1997).

In my own study of Fatma, this cell represents a comparison between external appropriations and

internal appropriations (repetitions of words directed at the girl). It turned out that there was a systematic difference between the two. The girl tended to repeat multi-word stretches of previous talk (two, three or more words) more frequently in external than in internal appropriations, a fact we will return to later on.

This list of examples could easily continue. The point is that statements like these - despite their being formulated in different disciplinary areas and with quite different terminologies - all share a common feature, namely the attempt to describe the correlation between a certain discourse phenomenon and 'something else', be it one of the classical independent variables of social research (age, gender, culture, social class) or another comparable category.

This relationship may be expressed in numerical quantitative terms (X is associated to Y in 78% of the cases) or with verbal quantifications ('X is frequently associated to Y' or 'X often occurs with Y' or even gnomic statements like 'when X, speakers do Y'). There has been lively debate about these different ways of expressing relationships, and this is not the place to pursue it. What is to be underscored here is that all these statements belong to the same general type in the proposed classification.

5.2 Interpretation

One can try to interpret or explain the correlations described in the previous cell. For example, one might wonder why Fatma tended to repeat more words in external than in internal appropriations. A possible interpretive line might be that when the girl was not already involved in an activity vector (external appropriations), she had to make the relevance of her contribution more explicit than when she was already officially engaged in the conversation (internal appropriations). Hence, repeating more words increased the chance of her turn being seen as relevant. Furthermore, a linguistically 'heavier' utterance made it clearer to others that she was trying to become a ratified participant, which was all but obvious in a highly competitive communicative environment like the nursery.

On a more macro level, in ethnographies of communication the peculiarity of a communicative practice may be attributed to a general cultural ethos. For example, the relative frequency of direct, non-mitigated speech acts in Hebrew has been associated to a linguistic ideology whereby Israelis tend to portray themselves as frank, sincere, and assertive people (Katriel 1986). Likewise, communicative differences between men and women have been explained by Tannen (1990) in terms of different fundamental attitudes instilled since primary socialization – while men tend to perceive social relationships more in terms of status, women rather seek intimacy and interpersonal bonding.

Many consider this type of interpretations questionable. Their very general nature makes them highly speculative and hardly falsifiable. There is also a risk of imposing on data interpretive categories that are abstract, etic, prefabricated and perhaps inadequate for representing the phenomena at hand. However, there are also those who counter such objections by asserting that interpretive comparisons, be they cross-cultural or of another nature, are a 'high-risk enterprise (...) but one should live dangerously – no risk, no gain, and those who remain confined to the safest zones of linguistics make this science dull and useless' (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1994: 122; my translation).

5.3 Theory

Some statements in the previous cell can already be considered part of 'theories' in the more usual sense of the term, that is, the attempt to explain a relationship among phenomena through general interpretive principles. Not everyone using general interpretive principles calls them 'theory' and some prefer a more neutral 'model' or 'framework'. Many do not even give a name to their general interpretive principles, which remain implicit, taken for granted, or ascribed to a 'common sense' that the researcher is supposed to share with the participants. Still others do not use the term 'theory' because they feel it should be reserved to a set of systematically connected statements

forming a coherent explanatory whole, while these researchers realize that their explanatory principles are provisional, entirely revisable and at best limited to small domains (as was the case with my study on Fatma).

The term ‘theory’, rather common in cognitive and social psychology, or in some branches of linguistics, is thus rarely found in discourse studies, barring perhaps the area of speech act pragmatics, as for example in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory.

Even those using the term ‘theory’ may mean rather different things. Stivers and Rossano (2010), for example, propose a ‘theory’ (also called a ‘model’) that aims at describing how speakers try to ‘mobilize responses’ from their interlocutors. The model postulates that some types of action, like offers or requests for goods and information, commit the interlocutor to responding more than other actions, like assessments, noticings, and announcements. This first gradient combines with another one, relative to some ‘response mobilizing features’, such as ‘interrogative lexico-morphosyntax, interrogative prosody, recipient directed speaker gaze, and recipient-tilted epistemic asymmetry’. As a consequence, a turn performing an action that is scarcely response-implicative may however make a response much more likely if it contains some of these features. The model thus advances a limited but empirically falsifiable hypothesis on the relationship between features of the first turn and its chance of getting responded to.

The theory proposed by van Dijk (2008) has a much broader scope and aims at giving a general picture of how the human mind understands and produces discourse, based on the notion of mental model. A central role is given to the notion of ‘Context models’, that is, mental representations, partly abstract and schematic and partly concrete and episodic, that speakers activate in order to understand and construct discourse contexts. Context is thus not seen as a static container, pre-existing interaction, but is something speakers socially and cognitively ‘make’ during their acts of text production and comprehension.

Once again, it is not our aim here to evaluate the usefulness and validity of such models. Our

purpose is to illustrate the possibility of their existence and relate such claims to others of a different nature. In all cases, they are very general statements, trying to capture a set of relationships among categories in a unified explanatory framework.

6. Discussion

In the previous pages a typology of statements on discourse data was proposed, which can be summarized with the following table.

[TABLE 2 NEAR HERE]

Shaded cells are those where it makes sense to ask whether one should quantify or not, and how, whereas in the others the question does not even arise.

Throughout the first row, containing single-case analyses, it is pointless to speak of quantification. In the second row, quantification could be relevant on a descriptive level, to give a precise idea of the corpus' size, specifying for example that the collection is made of 12, 63 or 297 cases. In this same cell, one might also report some quantitative aspects of the phenomenon under investigation – for example the mean length of turns performing a certain action or the prevalent lexical or syntactic patterns used. When one turns to the interpretation of all these cases (second cell of the second line), trying to explain how they work and what they have in common, quantification is no longer relevant – the interpretive process remains the same whether it is based on 5, 500 or an unspecified number of exemplars. Surely, the interpretation's reliability may change, and this is why on a descriptive level it may be useful to make explicit the data-base's size. Furthermore, some of the quantitative observations made at the descriptive level may be used to warrant a particular interpretation. Hence, analysis at this level does not directly imply any quantification, but may to

some extent rely on the quantitative observations made in the previous cell. No quantitative elaboration on data is needed to produce the taxonomies of the last cell.

Quantification is definitely relevant in the first cell of the third line. Comparing phenomena, or their realization across contexts and situations, almost always involves some kind of quantitative analysis. For example, I wrote that Fatma 'tended to repeat multi-word stretches of previous talk more frequently in external than in internal appropriations'. This quantitative difference might be expressed with words, such as *more frequently,* relying on the researcher's 'experience or grasp of frequency' (Schegloff 1993: 119), or with numbers, by coding and counting all the cases to arrive at an exact figure (e.g. 8/105 vs 30/123; or 7.6% vs 24.4%, as was the case with Fatma's internal vs external appropriations). This is not the place to discuss the pros and cons of these different forms of quantification. The point to be made here, however, is that they are different versions of the same type of statement within the proposed table.

The second cell of the third line contains statements that are not in themselves quantitative, although they may be based on the first cell's quantity-based remarks. For instance, the reason given above for Fatma's tendency to repeat longer stretches of talk in external than in internal appropriations rests on observing that the phenomenon is more frequent in one category than in the other. The third cell in this line can also contain statements implying quantities, such as Stivers and Rossano's (2010) prediction that it is *more likely* that the interlocutor will respond if all the specified conditions occur.

This discussion on quantification indicates one of the possible areas where the proposed typology can be relevant. 'Quantitative' and 'qualitative' approaches to discourse have often been contrasted. In fact, quantification becomes necessary for some types of statement only. It is not needed for single-case analyses, nor for studies whose aim is to show that people *do* or *can do* something and interpret what they are doing. For the statements requiring quantification, the discussion is not so much on whether to quantify or not, but on different forms of quantification –

numeric or verbal, based on explicit coding or on the researcher's intuition. Likewise, the objection that is often directed at studies containing numeric quantifications, that is, that quantification draws the researcher's attention away from individual cases (e.g. Zimmerman 1993), holds in fact for all the statements in the second and third line, for any general statement, be it numerically quantified or not, by definition abstracts from single cases. One can make recommendations as to how this abstraction process should be conducted, so that general categories remain firmly grounded on the observation of particulars, but moving from the first line to subsequent ones inevitably implies a departure from the single case and its unique details.

Likewise, the interpretive categories used in the cells of the second column vary widely from one analytic tradition to another, as do the criteria employed to assess the quality and validity of an interpretation. In some approaches, interpretations are based on psychological constructs, such as mental model, intention, or belief; in others on socio-anthropological ones, such as power, status, hierarchy, dominance, or social distance; in others still on micro-interactional categories, like preference, conditional relevance, or repair. The table serves to show that, despite these differences, they are all the same type of statement about data, provided they are at the same level of generality. In this way different methodological options can be readily compared. On the other hand, if one goes from one cell to the next, the contrast will no longer be between different ways of making the same kind of observation, but rather among different types of observation altogether.

A final example may help to see how the proposed typology can be used to compare different approaches with the same research object. A number of scholars, sometimes labeled 'cognitive-interactionists', have investigated conversations between native and non-native speakers, focusing on how they deal with various sorts of linguistic problems (for a review see Mackey, Abbuhl and Gass 2012). These studies have mostly been focused on testing statements in the third line of the table – how interactional episodes on linguistic forms and meanings are correlated with other variables, such as the more or less successful acquisition of L2 structures, or the participants'

gender, linguistic level, working memory. Statements of the second line are produced simply in order to respond to the questions raised in the third line – cases are coded and gathered in different categories with the aim of comparing them. Single cases of the first line are at best reported as examples to illustrate the different categories.

Other scholars, who might be called 'social-interactionists', have criticized this type of research because statements on the relationship among variables imply the assimilation of many cases into a few categories, which inevitably implies losing sight of the specifics of single interactional episodes. Several studies with a conversation-analytic approach have shown, through detailed single-case analyses, that L2 users can do many things not systematicaly considered by cognitive-interactionist researchers: by focusing on certain linguistic forms in repair sequences, participants can have ends other than simply solving communication problems, can make relevant several types of identity beyond those of native/non-native, and can show sophisticated communicative skills independent from their (in)competencies in the L2. They *can*: these are typical first-line statements, which show that something can happen, and then proceed with interpreting 'what is it that's going on there'. A few studies in this area have also tried to identify recurrent practices, for examples how native and non-native speakers collaboratively construct word searches (Koshik and Seo 2012), and even fewer have looked for systematic correlations among categories, like comparing different ways of doing repair among natives and non-natives (Wong 2000).

The difference between cognitive-interactionist and social-interactionist approaches is thus twofold. On the one hand, they employ different interpretive categories (second column in the table): psychological constructs such as attention, noticing, memory, or socio-discursive constructs such as repair, action sequence, and identity. On the other hand, they prioritize different types of statement: general assertions of the third line vs meticulous case analyses of the first one (or 'abstractness' vs 'situatedness', following Ortega 2011: 168). This also bears on the type of data being used. Conversation-analytic approaches employ naturalistic data, which are perfectly suitable

for locating one or a few salient episodes and interpreting them in close detail. Cognitivist approaches, with their need to find systematic and reliable correlations, need many similar cases, which is why they usually create semi-artificial elicitation conditions.

Some believe, like Hauser (2005), that the opposition cannot be reconciled. In his critique of coding practices, he seems to imply that all generalizations are questionable as they all lose sight of individual cases, so that the logic conclusion seems to be that conversation analysis and other approaches to interaction need be confined to the description and interpretation of single episodes. Others think that the two traditions may try to improve each other (e.g. Seedhouse 2004:247-253; Fasel Lauzon and Pekarek Doehler 2013). Cognitive-interactionists may learn from conversation analysis a different 'look' on interactional phenomena, so that their interpretation of phenomena in order to group them in classes and categories can be more sensitive towards action trajectories and participation dynamics. Social-interactionists may improve the way they express general and correlational statements, when they wish to express them, in order to define more explicitly the criteria used to form categories and to report their frequencies and correlations, going beyond impressionistic characterizations like 'massively', 'typically' or 'routinely'.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, the aim of this article was to clarify and distinguish the different types of statement that can be made on discourse data. Each of these types has its usefulness and legitimacy, and researchers may choose whether to focus more on one or the other. Their choice may depend on theoretical, ideological, biographical (the 'school' one was socialized in), even aesthetic reasons. Some cannot bear the analyses in the first line, finding them boring and pointless. Others criticize the statements in the third line, arguing that they are abstract speculations based on arbitrary and

decontextualized theoretical categories. As we all know, aesthetic preferences cannot be discussed. The author of this article obviously has his own, too, but he made an effort not to make them surface too much, trying to present each cell in the most neutral way, describing what it has to offer and finding that each type of statement has indeed something to offer.

The hope is that this exercise will contribute to a comparison across methods and approaches. A better understanding of the types of statements we produce – making clear their level of generality and interpretation – may be a first step towards a constructive interdisciplinary dialogue. This does not mean effacing differences in an overall methodological muddle, but rather trying to discipline and clarify disputes between traditions and highlight areas where controversy may be based on a confusion of levels.

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Table 1. Levels of generality and interpretation.

	Description	Interpretation	'Theory'
Single case			
Collection of cases			
Comparison across categories			

Table 2. Types of statements about discourse (shaded cells indicate that quantification is relevant).

	Description	Interpretation	**'Theory'**
Single event	Presenting an event: 'X can happen'	Interpreting the event: 'what is it that's going on here?', 'Why that now?'	Developing a frame of mind, analytic categories, a descriptive method
Collection of events	Identifying a recurrent pattern, a form: 'X happens several times'. Possibly, calculating how many instances of it are in the corpus or some quantitative features	What happens in all the episodes of that kind? Identifying a socio-semiotic genre, a practice.	Establishing (classes of) practices and phenomena.
Comparison across categories	Comparing a category with another, or its realization by different groups of speakers or in different contexts: 'X occurs more frequently here than there'	Explaining correlations with general principles ('the correlation between X and Y is due to...' or 'can be understood as...').	Identifying general explanatory principles, making predictive hypotheses; providing accounts for regularities.

[1] Further information about Fatma and the study can be found in Pallotti (2002)

[2] Another presentation logic is also possible, going from more descriptive to more interpretive and theoretical statements, and readers are invited to re-read the table in this sense, too, paying thus more attention to what is common among cells in the first, second and third column.

[3] One may say that 'regularly', 'typically' etc apply only within a given corpus, and thus make no claims regarding the larger population. However, this too raises the issue of deciding what is to be treated as 'regular' in a corpus, what is 'frequent' (or happens 'often') and what is 'rare'. Researchers should thus be explicit about what level of generality they imply with their claims and the criteria they follow to conclude that a behaviour is 'general' rather than just happening 'some times'.