Discursive psychology contributions to qualitative research in social psychology: An analysis of its ethnomethodological heritage

Antar Martínez-Guzmán[a]*
Antonio Stecher[b]
Lupicinio Íñiguez-Rueda[c]

[a]University of Colima, School of Psychology. Colima, Mexico
[b]Diego Portales University, School of Psychology. Santiago, Chile
[c]Autonomous University of Barcelona, Department of Social Psychology. Barcelona, Cataluña, Spain

Abstract: This article aims to characterize the specificity of Discursive Psychology (DP) as a particular theoretical and methodological proposal for qualitative research in social psychology, differentiating it from other forms of qualitative research and discourse analysis in this area. In order to do this, we highlight the important influence of the ethnomethodological perspective as a central theoretical background of the DP, largely defining its conceptualization of social order and its approach to empirical work. First, we characterized the ethnomethodological approach to social reality, emphasizing how it conceives the social actor, the social order and the social action. After that, we describe the way in which DP adopts certain theoretical and methodological principles of the ethnomethodological tradition, which allow a better understanding of the specificity of DP in the field of qualitative research in social psychology.

Keywords: discourse, social psychology, ethnomethodology, qualitative research.

Introduction

Discursive Psychology (DP), which emerged from the end of the 1980s in England, is one of the most important theoretical/methodological developments in the field of the contemporary Social Psychology. Assuming the implications of the linguistic turn in the Social Sciences and Humanities (Rorty, 1998), and developing a strong criticism of the cognitive and neopositivist matrix of the hegemonic Social Psychology, DP has been constituted in a theoretical perspective and an empirical research model, offering an alternative way of conceptualizing and studying psychological phenomena and psychosocial processes[1] Billig, 2012; Augoustinos & Tileaga, 2012; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Edwards, 2003; Garay, Iñiguez, Martínez, 2003; Hepburn & Wiggins, 2005; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 2000a, 2000b; Potter & Edwards, 2001; Sisto, 2012; Wetherell & Potter, 1988).

Starting from thorough analysis of the discursive practices in their usual contexts and of the consideration of language as social action and configuring mechanism of realities, DP offers a new approach in the "psychological" field, which breaks with the distinction between "internal cognition" and "external world" that underlies dominant social cognitive approaches (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The study focus of DP are actions that, through the discourse, individuals carry out in different practical situations, as well as the way in which participants, in such interaction contexts, build special versions of the world and the "mental reality" aimed at the achievement of certain pragmatic purposes (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 2000a, b). Thus, the interest–rather than in the "psychological entities" understood as abstract and formalizable internal psychic dynamics in certain universal rules–is in how individuals use, in their life social, various psychological notions ("I thought", "I remembered", "I felt that way") and produce within the framework of a local and specific discursive action what can be considered the "psychological" field. As pointed out by Edwards and Potter (1992), "rather than seeing the study of discourse as a pathway to individual's inner life, whether it be cognitive processes, motivations or some other mental stuff, we see psychological issues as constructed and deployed in the discourse itself" (p. 127).

This perspective approaches the study of classic psychological processes and psychosocial categories regarding the use, by analyzing the ways in which an individual located in a specific field of discursive interaction seeks to achieve certain practical purposes. Thus, for example, it is interested in the way in which the individual explains and accounts for their actions creating a certain account of the past (*memory*); in which rhetorically builds a particular version of the facts presenting it as an objective, factual

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1   In 2012, The British Journal of Social Psychology dedicated a special number entitled "Twenty five years of Discursive Psychology". This is in the context of the completion of 25 years of the Discourse and Rhetoric Group (DARG), of the Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, which has been the main actor in the emergence and development of Discursive Psychology.

*   Corresponding address: antarmar@gmail.com, antar_martinez@ucol.mx

report (*knowledge*); in which assigns specific responsibilities to others and themselves within the framework of the events occurred (*assignment*); in which develops, in the concrete use they make of language, specific evaluations of people and objects (*attitudes*) and positions themselves and others through certain linguistic strategies in a particular identity (*social identity*). In other words again of Edwards and Potter (1992):

> Rather than seeing such discursive constructions as expressions of speaker's underlying cognitive states, they are examined in the context of their occurrence as situated and occasioned constructions whose precise nature makes sense, to participants and analysts alike, in terms of the social actions those descriptions accomplish (p. 2,3).

DP although shares, with others alternative approaches (comprehensive, hermeneutic and/or phenomenological) of the social psychology, its commitment to the qualitative research, its criticism to social cognitive and experimental approaches of psychosocial research, and its distancing from structural-functionalist perspectives of the social theory; at the theoretical and methodological level, it also presents important differences and specificities regarding these other alternative approaches to the Social Psychology (Iñiguez, 2006). Thus, for example, DP's focus is not placed primarily, as in much of the current qualitative psychosocial research, on the reconstruction and interpretation–through any method based on the logic of qualitative content analysis–of the meanings and senses that the individuals develop from their own action and social objects. On the contrary, DP places at the center of research on *social action*, the way in which people interact with each other on a daily basis and co-build, through different discursive practices, the social world and the domain of the "psychological". It is a social psychology of practices focused on empirically and rigorously studying–using the methodological tools of discourse analysis–discursive practices from which the social action is organized, produced and regulated locally (Potter & Edwards, 2001; Wetherell & Potter, 1988).

Despite the richness and novelty of its approach, and the many opportunities of theoretical reflection and empirical inquiry that it offers, DP has had, speaking in general terms, a poor reception and development in the context of the Latin American social psychology. This, said coarsely, can be characterized, on the one hand, by the primacy of the dominant social cognitive approaches of neopositivist roots, and, on the other hand, by a significant (though always minority) development in the last decades of psychosocial approaches of interpretive cut, which through the recovery of phenomenological, interactionist, constructivist, critical theory and/or hermeneutical approaches have given a strong impetus to qualitative research within the region[2].

The purpose of this article is to contribute to account and specify the distinctive characteristics of DP, giving some of its most significant contributions and innovations to the field of social psychology and qualitative research. Specifically, the article focuses on highlighting the strong influence of the theoretical and methodological postulates of Ethnomethodology in DP, showing the way in which this ethnomethodological imprinting gives DP a large part of its specificity and singularity as conceptual framework and analysis perspective of the psychosocial processes (Edwards, 2003; Potter, 2000a; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Ultimately, this effort aims to contribute to show some logic of qualitative psychosocial research of ethnomethodological sensitivity less developed in the Latin American context[3], which rethinks the understanding of the social reality and that of the individuals that participate in it, placing in the center of its concern the understanding of the daily discursive practices and situated from which the individuals actively produce and reproduce social life.

In light of this purpose, the article has been organized as follows. First, a presentation of Ethnomethodology is developed as a particular sociological school, emphasizing the way in which it conceptualizes the notions of social actor, social order and social action. This section highlights some key concepts of this (micro)sociological school: competent member, reflexivity, indexicality and accountability. Then, starting from the development of five axes, it realizes how DP assumes in its conceptual frameworks and its investigative strategies the main ethnomethodological postulates. Throughout this characterization, we seek to clarify the theoretical and methodological features that distinguish DP from other qualitative approaches in social psychology, and even from other methodological approaches also based on some discourse analysis methodology. Finally, the article ends with brief final thoughts.

The ethnomethodological perspective: social reconsiderations

Ethnomethodology is a sociological theory that emerged in the 1960s in the United States from the pioneering works of Harold Garfinkel, which was further developed thanks to the work of researchers such as Harvey Sacks, Don Zimerman, Aaron Cicourel and John Heritage. The development of Ethnomethodology is embedded in a broader context of problematization in the social theory, characterized by an important critique of the Parsonian

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2   The Magazines *Psicologia & Sociedade* (Brazil), *Psicoperspectivas* (Chile), *Athenea Digital* (Spain) and *Universitas Psychologica* (Colombia), among others, have played a key role in the dissemination in the Ibero-American space of this boom of psychosocial research with qualitative approaches occurred in the last two decades.

3   A revision in the Latin American database of SciELO, which has more than 1000 journals, reveals (in general, not with a focus on Psychology) only 31 articles that somehow approach as a perspective or object of reflection the ethnomethodological tradition. In the same database, we can observe the publication in the last 5 years (2010-2014) of only 42 articles that are linked, in the abstract, to the category of Discursive Psychology, which is often used generically to refer to any study that uses or discusses the methods of discourse analysis, and not in the specific and narrow sense – a particular theoretical-methodological approach in the field of Social Psychology – that we give you in this article.

structural and functionalist paradigm (which tends to focus on the analysis of macro social systems or structures presumed to precede and determine the concrete practices of the individuals), and by a (re)valorization of micro-sociological perspectives of interpretative cut such as symbolic interactionism and phenomenological or comprehensive sociology. These approaches will focus on everyday life, common sense, symbolic interactions, intersubjective production of reality and daily practices where the society's production is set and sustained (Alexander, 1990). That is, those dimensions that constitute "profound possibilities" or, in Goffman's phrase, the "dirty water of social life", and which had been neglected by hegemonic macrosociological studies of functionalist or Marxist cut (Giddens, 1976; Wolf, 1982).

Although Ethnomethodology must be understood within this broader theoretical context of renewal of approaches to social reality, it is important not to lose sight of the epistemological, theoretical and methodological specificity and radicality of its approaches (Coulon, 1987). It is this specificity that is taken up by Discursive Psychology and that allows us not to confuse, for example, the ethnomethodological sensitivity with the perspectives of the comprehensive or interactional sociologies that, in the wake of Weber, Mead, Schutz, Berger and Luckman, constitute to some extent the dominant theoretical matrix of the qualitative micro-sociological research in the field of Social Psychology.

Then, we will try to account for this singularity by discussing the way in which Ethnomethodology conceptualizes the actor, reality, and social action. We will point out the way in which these conceptions imply a theoretical and epistemological break with traditional (macro)sociology, while, at the same time, we will mark, where relevant, the way in which the ethnomethodological view distances itself from other (micro)sociologies of everyday life. Before addressing this task, we make a brief general characterization of Ethnomethodology, with the intention of providing a framework for a better understanding of the three newly identified specific axes.

Ethnomethodology can be understood as the empirical study of practices, procedures, methods and commonsense knowledge that social actors use every day to make sense of it and, at the same time, to produce social scenarios in which they participate (Heritage, 1984, 1995; Robles, 1999; Rodriguez, 2008; Wolf, 1982). As Garfinkel (2006/1967) points out in his classic Studies in Ethnomethodology, the focus of Ethnomethodology "are practical activities, practical circumstances, and practical sociological reasoning as topics of empirical study (p. 9). It is important to note that, from this perspective, the object of study is not the meanings that people attribute to the situations of their ordinary life, but rather the set of strategies, procedures and methods from which the actors, in specific social scenarios, find the appropriate way to coordinate and proceed with the action expected in these circumstances.

So, it is a sociology of practice focused not on the actor's internal motivations or external determinations, but on the various practical methods that develops daily to recognize and explain social scenarios and act accordingly, producing the sense of social reality (Heritage, 1995; Wolf, 1982). As we will emphasize, for Ethnomethodology, language and its different uses in daily life are a key element of the methods and procedures of practical reasoning used by actors. It is through various typifications, classifications and explanations deployed in everyday speech, as an indissoluble part of the same action, that the different social scenarios emerge and are held locally and contingently (Potter & Weteherell, 1987).

We present below three fundamental axes to understand the specificity of the ethnomethodological perspective: its conception of the actor, order and social action. We will try to interweave in this exhibition some key concepts that bind or 'embody' the sensitivity of the ethnomethodological approach, namely: competent member, indexicality, reflexivity and accountability.

The notion of social actor

Against the functionalist idea of the social actor as a sum of status and roles within a structural system of social positions that precedes and constrains its action, Etnomethodology considers individuals as competent and active members within their social reality, endowed with a set of knowledge and practical knowledge that allow them to participate in the incessant production of the various social settings in which they are inserted (Coulon, 1987, Ritzer, 1993).

It is considered, according to Schutz, that each individual is "a sociologist in practical state", an agent that, with their linguistic resources, expresses, describes and builds daily social reality (Ritzer, 1993).

More than a mere position in a previous and independent institutional system, the individual is an actor endowed with a practical rationality that allows him to participate with others in the social dance of typifications, behaviors, explanations, descriptions that are modeling, from within the interaction itself, the specificity of the different social scenarios.

The notion of 'competent member' serves to anchor this conceptualization of the social actor. In ethnomethodological language, this term does not refer to an individual belonging to a social category or confined to a collective identity, but to a social actor able to manage and use language in a given community. According to Garfinkel and Sacks (1970, in Coulon, 1987), the notion of competent member refers to the use of the common language, to the fact that "*people, speaking a natural language, are engaged somehow in the objective production and objective display of commonsense knowledge of everyday activities as observable and relatable phenomena*" (p. 50).

In a concrete social setting, competent members make a naturalized and non-problematic use of language,

which implies that social activities and interactions run on a common horizon of understanding that does not lead to perplexity, astonishment, or surprise. Everyday scenarios that form the social world are lived and viewed as evident, natural, ordered, plausible, typical, available, continuous and stable (Rodríguez, 2008). As Coulon (1987, p. 51) puts it: Everyday scenarios that form the social world are lived and displayed as obvious, natural, orderly, credible, typical, available, continuous and stable (Rodriguez, 2008). As said by Coulon (1987, p. 51):

> Competent members do not need to ask themselves what they are doing. They know the implicit patterns of their behaviors and accept the routines inscribed in social practices. This is what makes us not to be foreign to our own culture and, conversely, that the behaviors or questions of a foreigner are strange to us.

In this way, the actors are not at all times reflecting or discussing the procedures, categorizations and methods involved in the production of the different situations (participating in a class at the university, working as a taxi driver, visiting a museum, discussing politics in a pub, having breakfast with the family), but they operate at a tacit and routine level. Thus, the competent member has a set of resources and procedures that allow him to conduct himself easily in the social world surrounding him. The figure of the competent member can be understood as a kind of "everyday wise man", which, when he holds a social meeting, puts spontaneous and routine knowledge and procedures at risk (Iñiguez, 2006; Coulon, 1987), and this ability is precisely the condition for the meeting to take place.

This revaluation of the individual agent, of his practical powers and his active and creative role in the configuration processes of the social reality, should not be confused, however, with the appeal to an interior space of psychological or subjective processes that would account for the essence of each person, and that would be "behind" and at the origin of the action. The following quotation by Garfinkel illustrates this point:

> Following a theoretical preference, I will affirm that significant events are wholly and exclusively the events of the behavioral environment of the person ... Therefore, there is no reason to look under the skull, since nothing interesting will be found there, except for the brain. The skin of the person will be left intact. Questions shall be limited to operations that can be performed in events within the people's environment (Garfinkel 1963, in Heritage, 1995, p. 301).

Thus, unlike other microsociologies such as phenomenology or symbolic interactionism, which incorporate a notion of subjectivity, consciousness, self or identity in their theoretical models of social reality,

ethnomethodologists focus on the observable actions of individuals in concrete contexts, taking into account the discourses that agents produce as part of the action (Ritzer, 1993). From this perspective, individuals are understood not as psychological subjects, nor as agents dedicated centrally to producing stable meanings about themselves and the social world, but as actors with linguistic competences, with diverse resources and observable knowledge that they deploy in their daily practices, and that allow them to operate in the social world and coordinate with others within the framework of the fundamentally pragmatic motivation of everyday life.

The notion of social order

For Ethnomethodology, social reality is a practical realization of social actors. This perspective assumes a strong criticism of the Durkhemian and Parsonian notions of social facts as independent events, external and previous to the daily practices of the actors, who are understood, from the functionalist lens, as strongly coerced and determined by a set of stable and supra-individual institutions that structure social reality (Alexander, 1990, Ritzer, 1993).

Ethnomethodology argues that the traditional sociology's focus on a set of macrostructures (political, economic, cultural) that are taken for granted–and that would not be accessible to ordinary members of society, but only to a social science positivist cut–would have led to neglecting a key dimension of social life. That is, social facts are the product of methodical, persevering, reflexive, thoughtful and competent actions carried out by the social actors themselves in practical activities, results that they themselves endow, cover and presume as rational and more or less correct to the extent that are useful and necessary to configure their practical realities (Robles, 1999, p. 180).

The central thesis of Ethnomethodology is that the social order is a practical achievement of the members who participate in society (Garfinkel, 2006; Ritzer, 1993) and not a set of facts or institutions that impose and constrain the actors. Thus, social reality is understood as a framework of "contingent achievements of common organizational practices" (Garfinkel, 2006, p. 44) and in order to know it, it is necessary to satisfy the incessant process of implementation and production of endogenously organized local settings.

It is important to note that the main interest of Ethnomethodology is not, as in other micro-sociological traditions, the intersubjectively shared meanings that the actors have of a social scene or object, nor the intentions and meanings that would individually explain the presence and action of an actor in said context. The focus is rather on the various methods of action and practical reasoning that the participants mobilize to recognize, insert, produce and sustain particular social situations, such as a medical consultation, a conversation in a store, or a trip in the subway[4].

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4   In this respect, it is worth recalling Sudnow's study, "Dying, the social

This perspective invites the researcher to reconstruct "from within" the same local contexts of action, the way in which the actors produce and maintain the stability, organization and naturalness of a given social situation. Rather than presupposing that this regularity is the product of structural determinants that impose their logics of action, and rather than approaching social situations as "examples" or "cases" of models and categories previously determined by the analyst, it would be precisely to reconstruct "the set of techniques that the members themselves . . . use to interpret and act within their social worlds" (Levinson, 1989, p. 281). This reconstruction demands from the analyst an effort of "phenomenological suspension" of theories and categories of previous analysis (Ritzer, 1993), so that it is necessary to reveal, inductively, the categories and strategies mobilized by the actors and not to impose from outside the situation a set of preconceived schemas and models, both descriptive and normative, about social reality (Levinson, 1983; Wetherell, 2001).

The ethnomethodological perspective proposes two basic concepts to address social reality as situated production, determined by the various (etno)methods (resources, practices, procedures, knowledge) that people display to produce the social order they inhabit: 'indexicality' and 'reflexivity'.

Indexicality refers to the contextual character of ordinary language: words (and actions) acquire their full meaning in concrete contexts of interaction. The indexical expressions are those whose intelligibility depends on the situation in which the expressions are enunciated, from various elements that are not found in the expression itself but in the own situation of enunciation (Coulter, 1991). It is in this line that Garfinkel (2006) reminds us of Husserl who

> spoke of expressions whose meaning cannot be decided by a listener without necessarily knowing or assuming something about the biography and the intentions of the user's expression, the circumstances of the emission, the previous course of the conversation, or the particular relationship of the actual or potential interaction that exists between the speaker and the listener (p. 4).

Garfinkel argues that the general character of the natural language participates in this characteristic and that the interaction forms have an indexical nature, so that there is no expression that has a complete and defined meaning outside its concrete use and the social space of its enunciation.

An important part of traditional psychosocial research has been concerned with "repairing" indexical expressions in different ways by interpreting them as an obstacle to accessing the essential meaning and generalization (Coulter, 1991): thus, the task has been to transform the "real expressions" and those situated in "ideal expressions" and, in this way, to abstract structures and categories that are then assigned to indexical expressions as if they were their own. In contrast, if we admit that the nature of the discourse and social action is hopelessly indexical, and that the expressions work in different ways in different contexts, the research cannot but be directed towards local settings and negotiations, trying to recover "from within" the contingent and situated uses of language that configure the specificity of each situation. This is how Garfinkel (2006) argues that the indexical nature of language should not be considered as an obstacle to an adequate knowledge of social phenomena, as a source of error or misunderstanding, but as a constituent part of the social reality that must be investigated as such, without the pretension of translating it or reducing it to general and preconceived categories.

On the other hand, the notion of reflexivity refers to the constitutive character of the language in use. It indicates that the factual character of a social situation depends reflexively on itself, on the way in which the same situation presupposes forms of explanation and (self)description that configure it recursively. Thus, "the property of reflexivity has to do at the same time with the description of a situation and its construction, in the sense that to describe it is to construct it" (Íñiguez, 2006, p. 75).

Reflexivity[5] points to a bi-directional movement that operates at all times: the social order is perceived/described as objective and real by the members and, at the same time, it is this perception/description that constitutes and imprints the factual character to social situations.

Adopting the position that daily reflective and indexical practices are those that describe and at the same time produce the social world implies a renewed view with respect to the social order; a view that dilutes the distinction between the explanation that an actor makes of a practice and the practice itself, understood as an underlying nucleus and prior to explanation. From this perspective, "there is no antecedent or code to be followed according to social reality; what exists is the action itself as a framework of

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organization of death", which explores ethnographically in a hospital, how "death" is managed, circulated and produced as a local social fact that is part of the daily life of this hospital. In relation to this research, Wolf (1982) points out, in a way that illustrates the difference between ethnomethodological sensitivity and that of other microsociologies, the following: "Sudnow thus analyzes the sociological structure . . . of death (in a specific community delimited in space and time): it is neither an analysis of the 'cultural images of death' nor of the subjective attitudes and dispositions towards it: it is rather a study of how is made, developed, constructed, contained in the practices, activities, methods of 'verifying death', 'declaring death', 'announcing death', 'suspecting death', etc.: modes and methods provide in this case the basis for describing what is sociologically death in a large hospital center" (p. 116).

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5 It is worth noting that reflexivity in ethnomethodological language is not "reflection" in the sense of a conscious mental exercise. When people are said to have reflective practices, it does not mean that they reflect on what they do. On the contrary, members are not aware of the reflective nature of their practices (Coulon, 1987), and are not interested in circumstances and practical actions as topics of reflection or problematization; if it were not in this way, the natural development of everyday activities would be constantly hampered. In this sense, reflexivity as a phenomenon becomes visible only when the "natural attitude" with which the world is treated daily is abandoned.

practices and discourses that institutes it at every moment" (Íñiguez, 2006, p. 74).

The notion of social action

From the functionalist sociological model, as well as from many psychological traditions, understanding social action involves exploring the motivations of individual actors, which in turn would depend on the internalization of rules and cultural values typical of the institutions in which those actors have been socialized. It is assumed, therefore, that the analyst could understand, anticipate and explain the reason for social action or individual behavior in a particular context, from the knowledge of social rules that would be previous/external and which is presupposed to organize said context (Heritage, 1995; Ritzer, 1993).

Ethnomethodology criticizes this normative paradigm of social action and raises a different conceptualization of the relationship between rules, actor and action. Firstly, it problematizes the budget according to which we must explain the action from a question for the motivation of the actors, thus seeking an external cause and prior to the action itself, which, accounts for its origin. In contrast, Ethnomethodology will say that it is necessary to analyze it by satisfying the constitutive structures of the action itself, its recurrent patterns, which must be understood as local and self-organized emergencies resulting from the same situated organizational practices (Heritage, 1995 Ritzer, 1993; Wolf, 1982). In other words, Ethnomethodology replaces the question of "why" of an action, putting the question regarding how it emerges, is organized and sustains a particular field of actions in which different individuals coordinate with each other; field of actions that contains in itself its own intelligibility.

Secondly, Ethnomethodology problematizes the idea that recognizable rules in social settings are clear and distinct principles that organize and regulate, from the outside and regardless of the locally involved actors, events in a given situation. Against this image of the rules, it will be emphasized that these are always rules-in-use, resources mobilized by the actors in order to guarantee the rationality, coherence and continuity of the situation itself. The rules in abstract do not inform anything about social action, since social action always implies the practical, local and contingent articulation of these normative frameworks (Wolf, 1982).

This local articulation implies a permanent work of interpretation, adjustment and modulation by the participants in a given situation: How is the rule understood in the different moments, uncertain and variable, that define a particular context? What are tolerable or even reasonable exceptions? What criteria determine which cases are included and which are not in the category of compliance or non-compliance with expectations? In other words, the normativity of a situation is not something given in advance, a generic formulation that allows to anticipate the sequences of action of a social scenario, but, on the contrary, it is an achievement of the participants themselves who must decide and negotiate, in the course of the action itself, the way in which certain rules are mobilized and updated in a specific context (Heritage, 1984, 1995).

It is important to clarify that Ethnomethodology does not ignore the value of rules as action organizers, what stands out is that rules norms should be understood as rules in use, in an active game of negotiation and (re) interpretation. Rules always have fuzzy contours that must be "completed" by the actors within the framework of the various reasoning and practical action methods that configure social settings. Paradoxically, it is this flexibility, and revisable and interpretable nature of the rules which guarantees a certain consistency, continuity and regularity of the normative expectations frameworks that support any situation of social interaction. As Wolf (1982) points out, often the competent use of a rule requires transgressing it in certain situations, whereas it is its transgression which guarantees the reproduction of the normal state of things, which is the main objective of the normative regulations of a situation.

In this way, a unique aspect of ethnomethodological sensibility consists in rejecting any attempt to impose on the internal logic of everyday action some explanatory external principle–psychological or macrosocial–that ends up making the specificity of said action and its character of local and contingent implementation invisible by competent actors. This emphasis on the particular production of each social scene, on the need to understand it "from within", from the concrete procedures and practices that constitute it and account for it, is crystallized in the notion of accountability.

Accountability refers, first, to the fact that all social action is describable, intelligible, relatable or analyzable by the competent members who participate in it. A situation is 'accountable' in the sense it can be described or explained. Likewise, when reporting it we are producing this situation. The ' accounts' are a property constitutive of reality (Iñiguez, 2006). In this sense, daily actions such as describing, analyzing, criticizing and idealizing, become the focus of attention of the ethnomethodological, since it is these (discursive) actions that configure, in their regular and daily execution, the various social scenarios.

From here, it follows that the actors' reports are not mere descriptions of reality, but achievements in situation, practices of constant reconstruction of a social order that functions as a space of intelligibility so that the interaction happens. Thus, accessing people's accounts is not only about knowing how people report situations, but about knowing the very seams with which those situations are woven.

The notion of accountability can be read as an integrative concept that involves the rest of ethnomethodological concepts that we have exposed: 'accounts' are achievements of 'competent members' and are 'indexical' as they should not be considered external to the context where they occur. In addition, the accountability is

simultaneously 'reflexive' and rational: reflexive because the accountability of a circumstance or activity is at the same time the constituent element thereof; and rational because it occurs methodically, about activities that can be described and evaluated under the aspect of their rationality (Coulon, 1987).

In this way, the 'accounts' of a social situation are at the same time "informing" and "structuring". The notion of accountability, finally, allows you to think in a different way the relationship between action and explanation: it challenges the traditional distinction between both activities that has permeated social research. The concept of accountability suggests that action and its explanation/description form an inseparable unit: 'accounts' are the space where social action becomes intelligible and are also the constitutive operations of social situations. Explanations and descriptions about the world are actions in their own right, and use multiple ways to produce and sustain daily social situations.

To complete this panorama, and as an illustration of how the ethnomethodological view works, we propose the reading of a concrete social situation in light of the ethnomethodological concepts discussed.

Imagine a football match of the Argentine league with a crowded grandstand. The people who have come to the gathering are competent members because they know and practice the communication and conduct codes of this context: they agree and take for granted that the interaction is informal, where expressions of joy or anger, shouting and exaggerated gestures are part of the normal course of that scene. Each attendee assumes that the other attendees understand the situation and participate in it in the same way that he or she is doing it. On the other hand, attendees' verbal insults or vociferations shall not be interpreted as a sign of offensive, pathological or inappropriate behavior on the part of the people who express them, but the indexical property of daily language will allow them to be read as typical forms of interaction, and even expected, in that context. In addition, those attending the stadium will be able to report on the activity in which they participate (tell a friend on the phone how the game was, tell what is happening to a frightened child who goes to the stadium for the first time), as well as the situation in which they are and, in this way, they will be giving meaning and intelligibility to the very occurrence of the situation. Thus, in describing their own action and that of others within the stadium in a particular way, they will be configuring, as the notion of reflexivity points out, the specificity and rationality of that particular social scene. Finally, it is these descriptions/explanations, shared knowledge and concrete practices that produce the social situation as such and stabilize it as an objective social fact. Understanding the logic of these accounts that account for, while producing, the rationality, intelligibility and predictability of the scenario in which they emerge, allows us to understand that witnessing a football match at the stadium is nothing more than accounts, activities, practices and common knowledge that the competent

individuals put at risk in that situation and that, recursively, produce the situation itself.

The ethnomethodological imprinting of discursive psychology

So far we have tried to account for some of the main characteristics of the ethnomethodological perspective, its particular way of conceptualizing and approaching the study of social reality. Our interest is to contribute, through this course, to a better understanding of the logic of qualitative social research proposed by Discursive Psychology. Our thesis is that the specificity of DP within the broader field of qualitative psychosocial research, and even within the more specific scope of methodological approaches of discourse analysis, derives in part from the decisive influence that the ethnomethodological perspective has had on it.

Indeed, ethnomethodology is only one of the different theoretical traditions that come together and serve as a foundation for discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Garay, Iñiguez, & Martínez, 2005), which, while acknowledging its influence, also moves away from certain arguments and lines of development of ethnomethodology (Potter, 2005). In addition, if someone had to locate within the methodologies of discourse analysis a nucleus of development directly inherited from ethnomethodology, this would be that of Conversational Analysis (Wetherell, 2001; Sacks, 1992). However, our thesis is that beyond the plurality of antecedents that converge in Discursive Psychology, and beyond the heterogeneity and the different nuances of the recent developments of the Ethnomethodology, it is possible to recognize in the logic of qualitative social research proposed by DP an ethnomethodological nucleus that is part of its theoretical imprinting and analytical perspective of the psychosocial processes.

In what remains of this section we present five considerations that seek to illustrate how the key thesis of the Ethnomethodology is present in the logic of research and in the empirical work on the discourse of DP.

a) Like Ethnomethodology with its notions of reflexivity and accountability, the (social) Discursive Psychology meets the centrality of language as constitutive of social reality. As argued by Potter & Wetherell (1987), "*talk is not merely about actions, events and situations, it is also a potent and constitutive part of those actions, events and situations*" (p.21). Rather than treating language as a more or less precise representation of an external reality, or even more than considering language as a symbolic tissue that expresses certain underlying meanings and intentions of the social actors that we should interpret, we should try to carry out an analysis of the role of language in terms of its uses and functions in local and specific contexts. Thus, we see how the ethnomethodological consideration of language as an indissoluble part of the rationality and practical action that the social world produces is taken up by DP when proposing a functionally oriented approach to the analysis of text and speech (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Both in the notion of *function* (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) or *action* (Edwards & Potter, 1992) and in the motions of *construction* and *variability*, as axes from which to consider and analyze the discourse proposed by DP, what is at stake is an interest in the actions or functions (blame, apologize, legitimize, enable) that conveys a discourse, as well as a consideration of the constructive and productive character of language, both aspects of which can only be apprehended according to the specific, local and variable character of the different social situations.

b) On the other hand, and like the ethnomethodological proposal of a phenomenological suspension of the previous categories (sociological or psychological), DP will insist on the need for the analyst not to impose his own theoretical categories or judge a priori the domain of action that he is seeking to explain. As Edwards (2003) points out, a maxim of analysis is that each time the researcher wants to add something to the data he must "try to see to what extent it is something that the participants themselves (in their speech) try or handle in some way. If this question does not appear to be a concern of the participants, it should consider what it is based on to introduce it" (p.148). Very close to Conversational Analysis, and marking differences with other forms of discourse analysis such as those related to Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Wodak & Meyer, 2003) or to the authors closest to Foucault's work, DP will insist on the importance of adopting a strongly empirical perspective that respects to the maximum the own logic of the situated action and that reconstructs the sense of each situation "from within" of it (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wetherell, 2001). It is a form of discourse analysis that seeks to avoid to the maximum the theoretical over-determination of data, as well as overinterpretation, which lead the analyst to find in the interactions that he studies only what his previous categories tells him to find. This is how Wetherell (2001), echoing the more ethnomethodological perspective, poses a defense of the

> autonomy of the data as an object of study in its own right . . . . In conversation and interaction . . . participants are building a joint reality, their conversational actions demonstrate to each other their local interpretations of what is going on and the kind of event this conversation is. . . . in this sense the World has already been interpreted by the participants . . . (p. 386)

This empiricist and inductive logic highly sensitive to the local operation of the discursive action present in DP is to a large extent also an inheritance of Ethnomethodology and of the conversational analysis derived from it. This so-called *ethnomethodological indifference* should not be understood as a political indifference or as a lack of critical perspective, rather it is a style of social research and discourse analysis that does not exclude or is contradictory with a strong political commitment of the analyst (Wetherell 2001).

c) The emphasis on the practical achievement of the social world is another aspect that discursive psychology picks up from Ethnomethodology: everyday activities are considered the tissue and body of what we call the "social". In compliance with the ethnomethodological proposal, studying the social reality must consist in focusing attention on the natural exchanges of every day, where the social scenarios and situations are constituted. DP is nourished from this perspective to formulate an approach that is interested in the local, situated and contingent dimension of social actions (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Garay, Iñiguez, Martínez, 2005). This sensitivity leads it to develop a discourse analysis centered on how discursive action locally produces and sustains social reality. Rather than seeking the expression of certain internal cognitive processes or social macrostructures in the discourse, the attention is directed to discourse as an action that produces daily versions of the world and individuals, which constitute the warp, always local, variable and contingent, of social reality. As Potter (1990) points out, DP is a psychology of practices and offers a methodological approach that allows analyzing its specificity. It considers that the practices are situated, action-oriented, constructed in sequences of interaction and are oriented from the local categories and productions (indexical) of language of the participants themselves. From this perspective, and as we have already pointed out, the objective of the analysis is not to reveal the internal subjectivity or the external social structures that cause and organize the discursive action, it is the discursive action itself that is constituted in the object of study, and the way in which certain versions of the world and of the individuals that contribute to the local and contingent achievement of the social are emerging from it.

d) A consideration of the reflexive and self-constituted nature of scenarios and social action is another common feature between ethnomethodology and methodological approaches of DP. As we have shown, activities and situations constitute themselves through the implementation of ethnomethods by the competent members in specific occasions. It is from this notion that one can understand the empirical work of discursive psychology as an effort to visualize and focus on the (auto)constituent practices of social life, in the "depth of the self-organized surface". DP does not intend to reveal cognitive or macro-structural processes that supposedly underlie the activities of individuals. The common idea that leads to think that behind the manifest practices there are hidden processes (cognitive, symbolic, economic, etc.) that govern and organize them, and that these that precisely need to be discovered disappear. The way in which the relationship between actor and rule is reconceptualized, to which we have already referred, evidences this:

> there is nothing like what we call rules that make our behavior to be in a certain way, but when we do something we are making rules. It is not necessary,

therefore, to look for the rule that is behind regulating our behavior . . . . The rule is not a written code or a key that through the observation of people's we can deduce that it exists. The rule is the action (Iñiguez, 2006, p. 78-79).

By adopting a view that approaches social processes as reflective processes in the ethnomethodological sense, DP reverses the schema of the traditional psychological and sociological perspectives and proposes a discourse analysis model that helps to reconstruct in details the local, situated and self-organized production of different social interactions. What is important is what people are doing on a day-to-day basis and how these practices, understood as discursive action, constitute the social framework, produce versions of the world and of the individuals, thus stabilizing endogenously organized local orders (Edwards & Potter, 1992, Potter, 2000, Potter & Wetherel, 1987).

e) Finally, like Ethnomethodology, DP will have as one of its research focuses the very task and discourse of science, particularly those linked to the field of psychology. As it is possible to infer from the works of Garfinkel, science must be understood as a social practice that is produced through a set of ethnomethods that have a locally determined value and meaning. In other words, the practice of scientists must be understood through the same concepts of competent member, indexicality, reflexivity and accountability with which Ethnomethodology comprises the different social practices. Both science and magic, as well as sport, are offered to the study of ethnomethodologist's study as local configurations of action and practical reasoning, as "ingenious socially organized practices" (Garfinkel, 2006). In the words of Garfinkel himself: "no investigation can be excluded, no matter when or where they occur, no matter how trivial or vast is its focus, organization, cost, duration and consequence; "whatever is its success, its reputation, its practitioners" (Garfinkel, 2006, p. 43). Within the framework of this ethnomethodological inheritance, DP is characterized by

offering an analytical strategy that allows us to scrutinize the discourses and practices of the same scientific disciplines, taking into account how they produce particular versions of the world and of the individuals that support certain forms of social relationship. At the same time, it stands out by taking reflexively as an object of analysis the discourses that psychology itself produces, explaining how they operate rhetorically in an argumentative field, in which they pursue certain functions and in which they seek to contribute to expand certain versions of the social world that for reasons of different nature are considered by specific actors of the field as fertile, virtuous and advisable.

Final reflections

The key thesis that we have tried to argue is that the specificity and singularity of Discursive Psychology as a theoretical perspective and qualitative research approach in the field of Social Psychology derives from the strong influence received from the ethnomethodological perspective. Performing psychosocial research and discourse analysis from DP perspective implies a particular set of options and theoretical-methodological positions. These represent a major break with other forms of qualitative psychosocial research anchored in rather comprehensive, phenomenological, or interactionist traditions, which often–fundamentally in the form of grounded theory or qualitative content analysis–tend to be regarded as the only way of qualitative investigation of the individuals and social world. Also, as we have pointed out, the theoretical-methodological options of DP not only assume a specificity within the broad field of qualitative research, but also, also, within the vast but more limited field of discourse analysis methodologies. From the arguments developed, we hope to contribute to the recognition, valuation, differentiation and discussion of the great diversity of traditions and options for qualitative research in the field of contemporary Social Psychology in Latin America.

Contribuições da psicologia discursiva à pesquisa qualitativa em psicologia social: uma análise de seu legado etnometodológico

Resumo: Este trabalho tem como objetivo caracterizar a especificidade da psicologia discursiva (PD) como uma proposta específica teórica e metodológica para pesquisas qualitativas em psicologia social, diferenciando-se de outras formas de pesquisa qualitativa e de análise do discurso. Para isso, destaca-se a importante influência da perspectiva etnometodológica como pano de fundo teórico e central da PD, que afeta fortemente sua conceituação do social e na sua abordagem do trabalho empírico. Primeiro, caracteriza-se a forma como a etnometodologia aborda o estudo da realidade social, enfatizando o modo como concebe o ator, a ordem e a ação social. Depois, chama-se atenção para a forma como a PD se apropria dos princípios teóricos e metodológicos da tradição etnometodológica, que permitem compreender melhor a especificidade da PD no campo da pesquisa qualitativa em psicologia social.

Palavras-chave: discurso, psicologia social, etnometodologia, pesquisa qualitativa.

Contributions de la psychologie discursive à la recherche qualitative en psychologie sociale: une analyse de son patrimoine ethnométhodologique

Résumé: Le document vise à caractériser la spécificité de la Psychologie Discursive (PD) comme une proposition théorique et méthodologique particulier pour la recherche qualitative en psychologie sociale, se différenciant des autres formes de recherche qualitative et d'analyse du discours. Pour cela, on remarque l'influence importante de la perspective ethnométhodologique comme arrière-plan théorique et central de PD, qui affecte fortement sa conceptualisation du social et l'approche au travail empirique. Tout d'abord, la forme dans laquelle l'ethnométhodologie s'approche à l'étude de la réalité sociale est caractérisée, en insistant sur la manière dont l'acteur, l'ordre et l'action sociale sont conçus. Ensuite, on se rend compte de la façon dans laquelle la PD s'approprie de certains principes théoriques et méthodologiques de la tradition ethnométhodologique, lesquels permettent de mieux comprendre la spécificité de PD dans le domaine de la recherche qualitative en psychologie sociale.

Mots-clés: discours, psychologie sociale, ethnométhodologie, recherche qualitative.

Aportes de la psicología discursiva a la investigación cualitativa en psicología social: análisis de su herencia etnometodológica

Resumen: Este artículo se propone a caracterizar la especificidad de la Psicología Discursiva (PD) en tanto particular propuesta teórica y metodológica para la investigación cualitativa en psicología social, diferenciándola de otras formas de investigación cualitativa y de análisis del discurso. Para ello, se destaca la importante influencia de la perspectiva etnometodológica como antecedente teórico central de la PD, la cual incide fuertemente en su conceptualización de lo social y en su aproximación al trabajo empírico. En primer lugar, se caracteriza la forma en que la etnometodología se aproxima al estudio de la realidad social, enfatizando la manera en que concibe al actor, el orden y la acción social. En segundo lugar, se da cuenta del modo en que la PD hace suyos ciertos postulados teóricos y metodológicos de la tradición etnometodológica, los cuales permiten comprender mejor la especificidad de la PD en el campo de la investigación cualitativa en psicología social.

Palabras clave: discurso, psicología social, etnometodología, investigación cualitativa.

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