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Judith Baxter

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JUDITH BAXTER  
 UNIVERSITY OF READING

**ABSTRACT.** This article responds to Billig's (2000) call for new forms of writing that might challenge the 'linguistic orthodoxies' of the critical paradigm. It also responds to Van Dijk's appeal in this journal for more examination of the differences between Conversational Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. It argues that Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis (PDA)<sup>1</sup> offers an alternative account of spoken interactions to those of CA and CDA, in that it explores how fluctuating power relations between speakers are continuously reconstructed through competing discourses. This approach is exemplified by a comparative analysis of girls' and boys' talk in a secondary English class, which was being assessed for its effectiveness in public contexts. The study reveals a link between the more powerful discursive positioning of boys, and the extent to which they were adjudged more 'effective' than girls as public speakers. However, a post-structuralist analysis shows that because girls are multiply located in discourse and not constituted as victims, they can be taught to resist certain dominant classroom practices.

**KEY WORDS:** *competing discourses, Conversation Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, gender, Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis, speech in public contexts, subject positions*

Post-structuralist theorists, with their more global view, rarely have their noses pressed up against the exigencies of talk-in-interaction. Rarely are they called on to explain how their perspective might apply to what is happening right now, on the ground in this very conversation.

(Wetherell, 1998: 395)

While Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis has emerged in fields such as feminist

studies and educational research as an analytical tool with which to investigate and evaluate 'real' samples of text and talk in context, it seems that it is still relatively under-used within the broader field of language studies. The recent gladiatorial contest in this journal between the two prize-fighters of discourse analysis, Schegloff (1999) in the blue corner representing Conversational Analysis (CA), and Billig (1999) in the red corner representing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), revealed this much. Little room is being allocated in the ring for alternative perspectives on discourse analysis – such as post-structuralism, despite its quite extensive use in other fields.

It is not the primary intention of this article to enter into the specificity of the CA/CDA debate, but rather to contribute to the wider discussion about the criteria for the evaluation of discourse analysis. Indeed, in the Derridean spirit of 'supplementarity' (Derrida, 1976: 27–73), which argues that in any conversation no single voice should be suppressed, displaced or privileged over another, I intend to set my own perspective alongside those of other analysts by demonstrating the particular insights a post-structuralist approach to discourse analysis (henceforth, for convenience, PDA) brings to bear. I view PDA not simply as a theoretically confident paradigm in its own right, but as an effective tool for explaining 'what is happening right now, on the ground, in this very conversation'. As both Billig (1999) and Wetherell (1998) have argued, there are too many critical and post-structuralist studies which pronounce on the nature of discourses without getting down to the business of what is actually uttered or written. This article will seek to show how PDA is particularly illuminating as a means of describing, analysing and interpreting an aspect of spoken interaction perhaps overlooked by CA and CDA: the continuously fluctuating ways in which speakers, within any discursive context, are variously positioned as powerful or powerless by *competing* social and institutional discourses. It will show how PDA is *not* concerned with the modernist quest of seeking closure or resolutions in its analysis of what discourse means, but rather with foregrounding the diverse viewpoints, contradictory voices and fragmented messages that research data almost always represents.

In this article, I draw upon a post-structuralist case study I conducted on girls' and boys' speech in a British secondary classroom. In so doing, I intend to present, through demonstrating PDA in practice, some of the links and connections as well as some of the contrasts and oppositions between this methodology and those of CA and CDA. I therefore contest the use of modernist, adversarial rhetoric that has to *prove* that one method of discourse analysis is 'better' than others; rather it will posit that there is room in the epistemological arena for an interplay between multiple perspectives and accounts of discursive practices, that only come into being when each is heard in juxtaposition with the others.

In the *first* section, I outline the origins and principles of PDA and indicate how it differs, both epistemologically and functionally, from CA and CDA. This discussion is set within the context of my own research field of language and gender in education. The *second* section describes the background to the study I conduc-

ted on girls' and boys' speech in a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) English classroom, and how I evolved the methodology of PDA from observation and experience within this particular research context. This is followed by an extended and detailed analysis of two stretches of spoken discourse, taken from the much larger study, which, in this case, were extracted from a whole class discussion. In the last section, I summarize my evaluation of the particular strengths of PDA as a critical tool of social inquiry in relation to CA and CDA.

### *Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis*

Wetherell (1998) has recently argued in this journal that the approaches of post-structuralism (which she appears to align with CDA) and CA can be happily integrated. She makes the case for a 'synthetic approach' to discourse analysis, which draws upon the combined strengths of CA's interest in the highly situated and occasioned nature of participants' psychological orientations within spoken interaction, and CDA/post-structuralism's more 'socio-political' concerns with the assignment of subject positioning through discourse. Although there is a post-modernist merit in her eclectic disregard for theoretical boundaries, I am at odds with her somewhat modernist construction of PDA as something akin to 'social learning' or 'sex role' theory. For Wetherell, subjects have a 'portfolio of positions' at their disposal, which 'remain available to be carried forward to the other contexts and conversations making up the 'long conversation'.' What is marginalized in her analysis, but is central to post-structuralist inquiry is a conceptualization of the ways in which shifting power relations between speakers are constantly negotiated through the medium of *competing* discourses.

For me, PDA follows Foucault's thesis (1980) that the self is not fixed in a set of socialized, transferable roles, but is constantly positioned and repositioned through discourse. Individuals both negotiate and are shaped by their subject positions within a range of different and often conflicting discourses, which vary according to historical, cultural or social context. The motor for this, according to Foucault (1980: 98), is power, which is:

never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation.

In line with this, post-structuralists have argued that individuals – for example, girls, boys, teachers and researchers, as in my study – are not unitary 'subjects' uniquely positioned, but are produced as 'a nexus of contradictory subjectivities' (Walkerline, 1990: 3), in relations of power which are constantly shifting, rendering them at times powerful and at other times powerless. Thus, speakers may potentially adopt multiple positions or multiple voices that interact with their conscious and unconscious desires, pleasures and tensions, as well as changes of

discursive context and social relationship. Belsey (1980: 132) has suggested that speakers must be thought of as 'unfixed, unsatisfied . . . not a unity, not autonomous, but a process, perpetually in construction, perpetually contradictory, perpetually open to change.'

Walkerdine (1990) has further argued that one of the most formative 'sites' for the construction of subjectivity for students is the school classroom. The subject positions available to them must be understood as partly historically produced and regulated. As a 'site of the production of subjectivity' the school classroom constructs a range of subject positions, some formalized and institutionally acknowledged such as teacher/learner, adult/child, peer learner/peer learner and authority figure/subordinate; and others that are culturally produced often as acts of resistance, such as conformist/rebel, or favourite/outcast/'dork'. These subject positions are further interwoven with the social relations of gender, as well as categories such as age, ability, ethnic background, class, and so on. Davies and Banks (1992), Jones (1993), Simpson (1997) and Walkerdine (1990) have all convincingly used versions of PDA to show that children and adults produce multiple subjectivities whereby they adopt positions of powerfulness in some discursive contexts and powerlessness in others. For example, if students are positioned as powerful within one particular discourse (e.g. male students 'doing power' over female teachers), they may well be positioned as powerless within an alternative discourse (e.g. children oppressed/controlled by the power of the teacher).

In many ways, PDA is closer to CDA than CA as I shall now discuss, but there are also a number of quite obvious differences. Like CDA, post-structuralist thinking is highly self-reflexive about its own self-development as 'knowledge', and its use of specialist rhetoric. Both question the assumption in positivist research that there is an independent, knowable world unrelated to human perception and social practices. Both CDA and PDA are interested in the workings of power through discourse, though conceptualize this rather differently. CDA assumes discourse to work dialectically (e.g. Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) in so far as the discursive event is shaped by, and thereby continuously reconstructs 'real' or 'material' events, situations, institutions and social structures. In contrast, PDA adopts an anti-materialist stance in its view that discourses operate as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). In other words, social 'realities' are always discursively produced, so that, for example, students' identities and therefore subject positions as speakers are being continuously reconstructed and open to redefinition *through* discourse, not outside it.

But, unlike CDA with its emphasis on emancipatory social theory on behalf of dominated and oppressed groups (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997), PDA expresses a loss of certainty about the existence of absolutes, or the benevolence or truth of any single paradigm or knowledge. Furthermore, in Foucault's memorable terms, any theory or research paradigm, by virtue of its emancipatory desire to be 'right', contains a 'will to power' and therefore a 'will to truth'. An emancipatory discourse, as it becomes established as mainstream, would in time become a 'totalizing' or imperialist one, a point alluded to by Billig (2000) in his recent edi-

torial. Thus, this deconstruction of emancipatory positions represents a core difference between PDA and CDA. Whereas CA eschews a social agenda in favour of 'sociological neutrality' in encouraging a more egalitarian enterprise to emerge 'naturally' from the data, both CDA and PDA openly recognize this declared act of 'naïve methodological and epistemological naivety' (Schegloff, 1997: 171) to be just that – naïve. Both PDA and CDA are self-reflexive in calling attention to the sociological and ideological assumptions contained within any research process. Indeed, PDA does not have a problem with CDA's engaged and committed approach to research theory, provided that it is openly declared and made explicit at all stages of data analysis and interpretation.

PDA cannot have an emancipatory agenda in the sense that it espouses a 'grand narrative' that becomes its own dominant discourse. Conversely, it must be continuously on guard, openly self-reflexive of its own agendas, values and assumptions. This does not mean, however, that post-structuralist enquiry cannot support social transformations, which are indeed of central importance in the erosion of 'grand narratives'. For post-structuralists, social transformations are not other-driven, totalizing missions, but particular, contextualized, localized and perspectival *actions* (e.g. the protest of a particular interest group, community or public campaign). PDA has an interest in the free play of multiple voices within a discursive context, which means that the voices of silenced, minority or oppressed groups *need* to be heard. Following Foucault's reasoning, I would suggest that PDA needs to deconstruct discursive contexts wherever dominant discourses seek a 'will to truth' and therefore 'a will to power'. In the spirit of Bakhtin (1981) and Derrida (1987), prevailing discourses such as these aim univocally to displace, suppress, overwhelm and overturn the interplay of minority or oppositional voices. A dominant discourse serves to inhibit the possibilities for a kinetic interplay of diverse voices, perspectives, accounts and narratives representing multiple social groups. The agency of individuals or oppressed groups to contest and resist their positions of powerlessness within prevailing or dominant discourses is the means by which spaces can be opened up for alternative voices, and diverse points of view. Here, PDA has a role to perform in locating, observing, recording and analysing discursive contexts where silenced or marginalized voices may be struggling to be heard, as I intend to show.

### *The research study*

The following discussion is based on some sample extracts from a reflexive, ethnographic study into girls' and boys' *speech in public contexts*. The study examined a mixed-sex class of 14- and 15-year-olds carrying out various activities for their oral assessment. As part of the new requirements for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination, students are required to be able to speak persuasively and influentially in 'public' settings. Language and gender literature (e.g. Bousted, 1989; Coates, 1995; Holmes, 1992; Tannen, 1995) has consistently argued that girls/women are often silenced by boys/men as speakers

in public contexts. If this really were the case – and it seemed to me to be somewhat contentious as a uniform statement – would girls find it more difficult than boys to meet the new GCSE assessment requirements? Thus, the larger study sought to discover what constituted ‘effective’ speech in public contexts for GCSE assessment purposes, and to investigate whether such constructs were equally applicable to girls and boys. As I develop below, my choice of PDA to analyse the data emerged ethnographically from observation of experience ‘on the ground’, rather than from a predetermined commitment to particular frames of reference.

#### COMPETING DISCOURSES

From an early stage in my observations of girls’ and boys’ speech in the classroom, I noted that definitions of an ‘effective’ speaker in public contexts have little to do with common-sense educational notions of whether a student has the ability to acquire and use nationally prescribed communication skills. Swann (1992: 79–80) has criticized past versions of the ‘Speaking and Listening’ attainment target in the National Curriculum (1989) for its construct of ‘communication skills’ as an ‘additive model of competence’:

. . . it implies that speakers can simply add on new skills or ways of speaking to those they already have. It also implies that girls and boys will use the same ways of speaking to similar effect. . . . A ‘communication skills’ approach suggests that language can somehow be tackled in isolation, as a discrete parcel of skills that speakers have at their disposal. It neglects the fact that, in extending the way they talk, teachers are also challenging the ways girls and boys conventionally relate to others.

In the spirit of Swann’s comment, it was the significance of the interaction of four particular classroom discourses on students’ talk that led me as an educational researcher to take up PDA both as a theoretical framework and as a research tool. Francis (1998) has said that ‘writers often fail to explain how they have categorised different discourses’. A brief overview is given below, but a fuller account of each discourse is given in Baxter (2000). After prolonged classroom observation, I realized that, as a consequence of the intertextuality of these discourses, certain students were more likely to be constituted as ‘effective’ speakers by their teachers and classmates, while others – both male and female – were more likely to be adjudged ineffective.

The *first* of these four classroom discourses was *peer approval*. I use this as an umbrella term for the way students’ relations with each other are organized in terms of notions of popularity, personal confidence, physical attractiveness and sexual reputation, friendship patterns, sporting prowess, and so on (Francis, 1998). Peer approval was also interwoven with a second, related discourse of *teacher approval*: that is, the extent to which a teacher appeared to favour or privilege one student as a speaker over another. This was clearly not always a source of empowerment for the recipient: the attitudes of students to notions such as teacher praise, criticism and favouritism were necessarily ambiguous and contradictory, as I shall show. The *third* was a complex and multiply constructed discourse of *gender differentiation* (Bing and Bergvall, 1998; Davies and Banks, 1992;

Francis, 1998), which not only appeared to inform common-sense thinking and day-to-day conversation, but was also deeply embedded within the structures of classroom discursive practice. The fourth discourse was one of a *model of collaborative talk*: that is, sets of expectations from the teacher and from the students themselves that all assessable talk should be co-operative, facilitative and supportive. There has long been the dominant expectation within UK National Curriculum English that students should be taught to speak and listen in this collaborative way (e.g. Barnes et al., 1965; Swann and Graddol, 1995; Wilkinson et al., 1990). Related to this, a fifth discourse of 'fair play' in classroom talk (e.g. Jones, 1993; Swann and Graddol, 1988) was seen to govern the practice of taking turns to speak in common contexts such as whole class discussions. In other words, there are a number of unstated rules governing how a class discussion operates, and the teacher must appear to be fair in terms of distributing speaking turns according to these rules. In sum, it was the relentless interplay among these discourses and the extent to which they alternated in positioning girls and boys as 'effective' or 'ineffective' as speakers in different public contexts, that emerged as the chief focus of this study.

The following methodological analysis as an exemplar to PDA is conducted on two levels, drawing upon practices of semiotic analysis (e.g. Barthes, 1993). On the *first* level, I carry out a denotative micro-analysis of two extracts from the group discussion, by making close reference to the evidence of both the verbal and non-verbal interactions of the speakers involved. This use of a detailed examination of spoken text in which my own value judgements are suspended has some similarities with the 'hands off' approach adopted to the data by CA. In contrast, a post-structuralist analysis would add the codicil that, however denotative a description aims to be, it is always a form of interpretation involving at the very least, a selection of focus, the highlighting of certain aspects for attention and the inevitable marginalization of others. On the *second* level, I attempt a more connotative analysis of the data, which weaves together the supplementary accounts of the research participants – those of interviews with the students, the class teacher and other assessors – in order to represent the multiple, contrasting and polyphonic perspectives of the case (Bakhtin, 1981; Linstead, 1993).

On grounds of space, I focus on 4 of the 24 students in the research study (2 girls and 2 boys) whom I have called Anne, Rebecca, Joe and Damion although there are references to other members of the class (e.g. Helen, Gina). Anne, Rebecca, Joe and Damion have been selected here because, for various reasons, they were all considered by their class teacher to be potentially 'able' speakers (although the study as a whole does consider the speech of students of varying abilities and aptitudes). As the focus of the original inquiry was to explore the extent to which *girls* within a mixed-sex class may experience difficulties as speakers in public contexts, I have chosen here to foreground the spoken interactions of Anne and Rebecca. Would the 'more able' female speakers be able to hold their ground alongside the 'more able' male speakers?



*Denotative analysis – extract one* A unit of work focusing on the theme of 'desert survival' was designed by the English staff at the school as a means of enabling students to practise speaking in a range of public contexts – for example, giving a talk, arguing a case and participating in a whole-class discussion. The two extracts here are both taken from a video-recorded whole-class discussion, in which the students are debating the kinds of items people would need in order to survive in the desert. The discussion has now begun to centre on whether or not the survivors would need a compass:

- 24 TEACHER: Anne?  
 25 ANNE: If you didn't go the, er, habitat (sic), you're not going to be able to  
 26 survive with just the water and say, the overcoat (JOE INTERRUPTS FROM  
 27 'SAY').  
 28 JOE: You can still go there, can't you?  
 29 REBECCA: Yes.  
 30 ANNE: Not if you haven't got a compass because you are south-west.  
 31 JOE: Yeah, but if you are going to be travelling during the day . . . (SEVERAL  
 32 OF THE BOYS TRY TO ADD ON, REINFORCE JOE; BOYS SPEAK LOUDLY  
 33 WITHOUT BEING NOMINATED BY THE TEACHER; A NUMBER OF GIRLS HAVE  
 34 THEIR HANDS UP)  
 35 TEACHER: Rebecca.  
 36 REBECCA: But it's pointless trying to stay in one place. You have got to try and  
 37 survive. You can't just stay in one place. (GENERAL HUBBUB AS REBECCA  
 38 SPEAKS; SOME HECKLING FROM ONE BOY; DAMION ATTEMPTS TO BUTT IN)  
 39 TEACHER: Hands up, everyone; hands up.  
 40 REBECCA: Until someone will, might come along, you've got to at least *try*. And  
 41 without a compass, you don't know where you are going.  
 42 DAMION: Yeah, but . . . yeah, but . . . (INTERRUPTS REBECCA FROM 'YOU'VE')  
 43 TEACHER: Damion  
 44 DAMION: I think that, sorry, just a minute . . . (GENERAL LAUGHTER FROM THE  
 45 CLASS AS HE MAKES FACES AND PRETENDS TO FALL OFF HIS CHAIR)

Throughout this extract, there is evidence to suggest that both Anne and later, Rebecca, struggle to complete a sentence or develop a point of view in a sustained way, because they experience a series of interruptions and distractions from other speakers, most noticeably from several of the boys. Anne is possibly half way through her point about walking to the habitation (l. 26) when she is interrupted by Joe (l. 28). Having got only 'the gist' of her point, he quickly challenges her. Rebecca at this point signals that she is 'on Anne's side' by answering Joe's question for Anne, who then succeeds in making the second half of her original point. However, if she is about to develop a reasoned case, she is unable to because Joe challenges her (ll. 31–4), supported by heckling comments from several other boys and from Damion in particular. During this sequence, Rebecca has kept her hand up, and the teacher apparently supports her conformity to the class rules, by nominating her to speak. In her next two speaking turns, Rebecca tends to assert her point and then repeat it (ll. 36–7), rather than developing a case by drawing on fresh evidence or new insights. It is at this point that she experiences further interruptions from several boys, as well as some heckling from Damion.

Having repeated his attempts to interrupt Rebecca (l. 38; l. 42) the teacher finally grants him a turn (l. 42). Instead of making a contribution to the discussion, he seems to falter and 'lose his thread' (l. 44). This is interpreted by other members of the class as a subversive act of clowning, and they therefore laugh. The video-recording shows Damion smiling and making faces (l. 45), clearly pleased at this reaction. He finally pretends to fall off his chair.

*Denotative analysis – extract two*

- 145 TEACHER: Rebecca?  
 146 REBECCA: (HER HAND HAS BEEN UP A LONG TIME) I agree with Joe  
 147 that you should walk at night so that you can cool off, but you need to sleep,  
 148 otherwise you are just going to, um, run out of energy, but I think it's  
 149 dangerous sleeping in the day because it's hot and you don't know what to  
 150 do. (TEACHER NODS; GIVES SUPPORTIVE MINIMAL RESPONSES.) I think if you  
 151 wait at one point you're just going to think, 'Oh, we could be doing some  
 152 thing right now, we could be at least trying to get where we want to go.'  
 153 TEACHER: Ummm . . . Anne?  
 154 ANNE: I think that Joe's idea of walking at night and staying put during the  
 155 day is a good idea, but how many people can actually read the stars?  
 156 (GENERAL LAUGHTER AT THIS. JOE IS HECKLING, 'There's a North  
 157 star . . . it's the bright one . . . it's the bright one . . .') Yeah, but who knows which  
 158 one is the North Star? The point is to get where you want to get . . . (ANNE  
 159 PERSISTS WITH HER POINT DESPITE HECKLES AND DERISIVE LAUGHS FROM  
 160 JOE AND DAMION). I'm just putting across the facts . . .  
 161 TEACHER: Thank you very much. Valid point.

In this extract, both Rebecca and then Anne show evidence of speaking more extensively within this public context, but not before encountering some difficulties in gaining access to the floor. The video-recording shows that Rebecca has had her hand up almost continuously since she last spoke at line 41. While she has clearly observed the class rules of waiting to be nominated by the teacher, it has not necessarily 'paid off'. When she does speak, however, she has one of the lengthiest turns of any student during the entire discussion. The teacher grants her both the 'licence to talk' and affirms what she is saying as she speaks, by nods and making minimal responses (l. 150). Perhaps because of this overt support, Rebecca is able to speak entirely without interruptions. She goes on to argue her case through the use of a number of rhetorical strategies: strategic agreement with one aspect of the opposing case (l. 146); counter-balancing this with her own argument (ll. 146–8); developing an imaginary scenario (ll. 149–52), and internal monologue (ll. 151–2). Whilst it might be posited that Rebecca's argument isn't strictly logical, she *is* able to sustain a point of view. Anne, however, does not appear to fare so well. Again her speaking turn is authorized by the teacher, but this is not followed up with verbal or non-verbal support. Furthermore, Anne has to withstand an onslaught of heckling and derisive laughter from both Damion and Joe, the latter in particular attempting to interrupt and take over her turn (l. 156–7). Despite this, she resists their interruptions (l. 157 and l. 160), challenges

and 'sees off' their arguments (l.155 and l. 158), thus achieving an appreciative laugh from the rest of the class, and thereby managing to complete her turn.

*Connotative analysis – both extracts* In these extracts, Anne and Rebecca both demonstrate their positions as key 'players' in the whole class discussion, but there is also evidence that the practices that might constitute an 'effective' speaker in this particular context, are mediated through competing discourses.

Who gets to speak, and to speak at some length in the secondary English classroom context depends on a complex interplay of subject positions largely governed by competing discourses. To consider first of all, the discourses of *fair play* and *teacher approval* it appears from the above evidence that not all students in the class are treated in exactly the same way. Both extracts foreground, by my very choice of them, moments when Rebecca and Anne get to speak. To this extent, they fail to offer a representative picture of Rebecca's and Anne's role in the discussion as a whole – there are longish sequences when neither gets to speak at all. It is observable from the video-recording that both 'putting your hand up' and 'waiting for the teacher to pick you' are rules that are not consistently observed. For example, Rebecca is nominated by the teacher to speak in both the extracts above, and gets more turns than several of her peers. Yet she has her hand up for long periods during the discussion as a whole, and indeed, there are sequences where she is the *only* student to have her hand up, but despite this, the teacher elects other students to speak rather than her. In the student interviews it is clear that Rebecca considers that she has been unfairly overlooked, and has reconstructed this in terms of her subject positions within the competing discourses of *peer* and *teacher approval*. When asked in the student interviews what she thought of the whole class discussion, Rebecca replies vehemently:

**Rebecca:** Favouritism. Miss never picked me. I had my hand up about five minutes before Anne did. She just puts her hand up and the teacher went, 'Yes, Anne.' I got really angry then. I can remember.

**Me:** Who gets picked and who doesn't?

**Rebecca:** The boffy people. Like the real good people who are real good at work. And the teacher thinks, 'This is on film today, she'll be good to speak.' But she never picked me.

**Me:** Who are the people who get picked?

**Helen/Gina/Rebecca:** Anne, Joe.

Rebecca seems to feel that she herself does not fit the teacher's model of a 'boffy' (from 'boffin') student, while in her view, Anne receives preferential access 'to the floor' because she *does* fit this model. Interestingly, Rebecca constitutes her own position as one in which she is obliged to compete with Anne for the teacher's attention. Thus, the 'winner' is empowered by being regarded as the teacher's favourite, but conversely, *peer* approval ensures that this victorious position is undermined by the disempowering, 'put-down' tag of 'boffiness' – that is, popular or likeable people among their peers in the classroom setting are unlikely to be 'boffy'. Rebecca, therefore, can be seen as perceiving herself to be relatively *powerless* compared with Anne in terms of the discourse of teacher approval, but

to be relatively *powerful* in terms of peer approval. Indeed, she was very voluble during the student interview compared with Gina and Helen who seemed happy to be allowing her 'the floor'. This was manifested by the ways in which they were echoing, supporting or building on her views during these interviews.

The extent to which either Rebecca and Anne are able to gain speaking turns in the whole class discussion – and having gained them, to speak uninterrupted, at any length – can also be 'read' in terms of their relatively powerless subject positions within the competing discourse of *gender differentiation*. From a post-structuralist perspective, it can be argued that female linguistic interactions may be circumscribed by the dominant definitions of femininity shaping the subject positions available to girls like Anne and Rebecca. *First*, both in their speech and behaviour, the girls showed a greater conformity (than did the boys featured in these extracts) to the 'rules' of classroom discussion, a finding which endorses previous language and gender research evidence (e.g. Spender, 1992; Swann & Graddol, 1988). For example, while Anne and Rebecca waited with their hands up for the teacher to nominate them to speak and thus risked not procuring a turn, several boys and notably, Joe and Damion, were prepared to 'rule-break' by 'chipping in' to interrupt and effectively disrupt each girl's turn; and in at least one case succeeded in taking over the speaking turn (Extract one, l. 42). In the student interviews, Rebecca indicates an implicit understanding of how such constructs as conformity and good behaviour are considered to be more compatible with female teenage identity, whereas constructs of non-conformity and misbehaviour are considered to be more compatible with male teenage identity, as these comments highlight:

**Rebecca:** I was probably more self-conscious in the bigger group in case I would sound a fool. I had a lot of things to say but I couldn't say them because I wasn't picked.

**Me:** So you wanted to speak . . .

**Rebecca:** Yes, I really did. I really wanted to say my view. At one point I was going to shout them out, but I thought, 'No, I better behave myself'.

**Me:** Was that affected by the camera?

**Rebecca:** I don't think I would have ever shouted out. That would have been rude and I would have got told off.

**Me:** Did anyone shout out?

**Rebecca:** Yeah. Joe and Damion did because they wanted everyone to know what they thought.

*Second*, girls appear to offer boys considerably more interactional support than they receive in return, again endorsing previous research (e.g. Fishman, 1980; Jenkins & Cheshire, 1990). In the second extract, we saw how both Anne and Rebecca pick up on, and build upon an argument introduced by one of the boys:

146 REBECCA: I agree with Joe that . . .

154 ANNE: I think that Joe's idea of walking at night and staying put during the  
155 day is a good idea . . .

In contrast, at no point during the course of the whole class discussion does

any boy ever endorse an idea introduced or developed by a named girl. This feature was so noticeable that it was remarked upon quite spontaneously during one of the student interviews:

**Kate:** The girls are quieter. The boys say something and the girls just support it.

**Claire:** The boys say what they think. It's like the husband and the little wife who has to support them.

**Kate:** The girls are like hiding their face in shame that they are actually disagreeing with the boys.

*Third*, boys don't just simply fail to support girls in classroom discourse; they actively seek to undermine girls' linguistic interactions and by doing so, manage, on occasions, to disempower them. In both the extracts, boys appear to use a number of ploys to prevent Rebecca and Anne from completing their turns, from straightforwardly challenging or counter-attacking a point of view, to loud heckling, jeering and face-pulling. Damion's final 'piece de resistance' – his pretence at falling off the chair – enables him to 'get a laugh', subvert the discussion, and simultaneously undercut the rather more serious points being made by Anne and Rebecca. By acting the fool, Damion successfully 'steals the limelight' ensuring that the attention is on him when he wishes to speak.

The teacher does not appear to help in this matter. While she was successful in preserving Rebecca's turn (ll. 35–9) she made no apparent attempt to protect Anne's. Indeed this lack of protection, followed by her legitimization of Damion's disruptive intervention by granting him a speaking turn, not only helps to condone male rule-breaking behaviour, but adds some weight to the view (Swann and Graddol, 1988) that teachers, boys and girls alike appear to collude in positioning males as more powerful within a range of speech contexts such as whole class discussion.

From a post-structuralist perspective (e.g. Walkerdine, 1990; Weedon, 1997) it can be argued that the discourse of gender differentiation works through the institution of the school and the classroom to undermine the possibility of girls achieving powerful subject positions through certain types of linguistic interaction. It serves male interests when girls *conform* to the rules of classroom discourse (e.g. by putting their hands up and not calling out) because it allows males a greater vocal space in which to struggle for influence over their peers and possibly for approval from teachers. Within such a discursive context, the competing discourses of collaborative talk and gender differentiation, which both coincidentally place a high premium on sensitive listening and orderly, sequential turn-taking, especially for females (e.g. Swann and Graddol, 1995), mean that girls may be systematically positioned at a disadvantage.

Nevertheless, such discourses cannot construct the practices of subjects without producing counter-acts of resistance, or supplementary challenges. In this case, Anne's ability to withstand male interruptions, to develop her argument, and to complete her turn (ll. 154–60) may actually strengthen her aptitude as a public speaker in the world outside school, where interruptions, heckling and

multiple or parallel conversations are often quite routine. This was a point implicitly acknowledged by English staff assessing Anne's performance:

**Assessor J:** I thought Anne thought on her feet and tried to develop it, whereas the boys' contributions seemed to be: 'There it is; make of it what you want; I've said it', and in Joe's case, 'because I'm the loudest.'

**Assessor P:** I was impressed by Anne though, because since last year I have never seen her perform in such an articulate way – very good at drama and role-play and confident in that way, but I have never seen her so articulate.

In summary, I shall add my voice to the others represented here. My own view is that girls like Anne, and particularly like Rebecca, are far from powerless as speakers within this classroom 'public' setting. But while they should not be constituted as 'victims', girls are none the less subject to a powerful web of institutionalized discourses that constitute boys more readily as speakers and girls more readily as an appreciative and supportive audience. It is possible that both CDA and PDA theorists might reach similar conclusions: that teachers and educators do indeed need to intervene to take some form of transformative action. PDA theorists would argue that girls, as the silenced group, need to be more clearly heard in the classroom. Girls need to learn how to resist certain dominant classroom discourses, so that they can, for example, operate within multiple and competing conversations, or 'run the gauntlet' of male barracking in order to cope with the particular pressures of speaking in mixed sex, public contexts.

### *The ambiguities of power*

PDA provides new possibilities not only for understanding how language constructs subject identities and for learning how speech is produced, negotiated and contested within specific social contexts, but also for making sense of the relative powerlessness or 'disadvantage' experienced by silenced or minority groups. PDA does have links and parallels with the approaches of both CA and CDA, but it ultimately produces more complex and possibly more troublesome insights into the possibilities for transforming social practices, as I shall now summarize.

If I had conducted a discourse analysis of the data drawing on the methods of CA, I would have been closely reliant upon the meanings and interpretations of the participants – in this case, students, teachers and examiners. CA would tend to draw upon the 'common-sense' narratives cropping up in the interview data, and thus would interpret the struggles experienced by the participants' in their own terms. In this study, the struggles of female speakers might be conceptualized in their own terms either as the result of poor or unfair teaching – favouritism – or as the consequence of essential differences between girls and boys. Alternatively, CDA would have more in common with PDA in that it would be likely to interpret the struggles of girl speakers as deeply implicated within dominant forms of cultural practice. Both CDA and PDA would recognize the institutionalization of school discursive practices that systematically privilege male over female speakers in the public space. Both would also agree that there is

a need to critique dominant discourses on oracy/schooling in order to expose the ways in which their practices serve to disempower certain categories of school students. Finally, both CDA and PDA would argue that theorists and practitioners are in a position to contest and resist those meanings – in policy and practice.

Where I would suggest that PDA differs from CDA is in its perception of the ambiguities and unevenness of power. While CDA is more likely to locate a group identified as silenced or oppressed as unambiguously powerless, such as female speakers within a patriarchal society, PDA is more likely to argue that females are multiply located and cannot be dichotomously cast as powerless, disadvantaged or as victims. PDA accepts that girls can and do adopt relatively powerful positions within certain discourses and also acknowledges their agency to resist, challenge and potentially overturn discursive practices that conventionally position them as powerless. In Jones' (1993: 164) call for more educational research to be conducted using a feminist, post-structuralist methodology, she suggests that,

A discursive construction of women and girls as powerful, as producing our own subjectivities within and against the 'spaces' provided is useful in offering more possibilities to develop and use a wider range of practices.

The use of PDA – in this case to illustrate the complex ways in which girls do indeed struggle to gain positions of power in the gaps between competing discourses that generally favour boys – is one way of opening up the possibilities for resistance and change. The use of PDA as an alternative methodology alongside those of CA and CDA also helps to challenge the inertia of 'linguistic orthodoxies' (Billig, 2000: 292), by opening up possibilities for new forms of writing that 'expose the self-interest and political economy of the sign 'critical'.

#### NOTE

1. Since this article was written, I have developed my ideas on PDA to incorporate an explicit feminist focus (now known as Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis or FPDA).

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JUDITH BAXTER is currently a senior research fellow at the University of Reading. Formerly a teacher educator at the university, she is known for her research work and school textbooks in the area of English and Language in Education. She has recently published a series of articles on boys and underachievement, gender and speech in public contexts, and discourse analysis. A book entitled *Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis* is due to be published in 2003. ADDRESS: The Reading and Language Information Centre (RALIC), University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Early, Reading RG6 1HY, UK. [email: [judith.baxter@tesco.net](mailto:judith.baxter@tesco.net)]