

## BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

**Katherine Bischooping & Amber Gazso**, *Analyzing Talk in the Social Sciences: Narrative, Conversation & Discourse Strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press, 2016. \$46.00, 222 pp., paper (9781446272497).

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In organizing an introductory book on qualitative research methodology, some scholars prefer to survey various philosophic stances that underpin research practice (Paul, 2004), or discuss the implications of a particular philosophic stance for doing research (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Carspecken, 1996; Wiley, 2011). Others take more practical approaches to mapping out various research designs (Creswell & Poth, 2014) or research procedures (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2010). To this interdisciplinary and international scholarship, Canadian sociologists Katherine Bischooping and Amber Gazso offer a new perspective in their co-authored book, *Analyzing Talk in the Social Sciences: Narrative, Conversation & Discourse Strategies*. They suggest attending to the data that a researcher has already collected, and address the question of what a researcher should do after completing her data collection. This practical perspective, starting with the appraisal of the feature of the data, allows Bischooping and Gazso to showcase strategies a qualitative researcher can employ in conducting her analysis. The authors thus carve out an analytic space between epistemological contemplation and procedural, basic coding analysis. Without losing sight of the larger picture of the epistemological underpinnings, their introduction of research methodology gravitates toward hands-on strategies.

To be more specific, *Analyzing Talk in the Social Sciences* focuses exclusively on “talk data,” the conversations taking place in naturalistic, institutional and research settings. To legitimize the choice of their focus, they argue that talk data has gained popularity since World War II, along with the wide use of tape recorders and “in response to social, political, and intellectual currents” (3). The book’s focus on talk data excludes several other types of data that qualitative researchers also frequently use, such as observation notes, historical archives, and texts on social and popular media. Because the authors stress the spontaneity, ephemerality, and embodiedness of a conversation, some forms of communication that belong to a broader definition of “talk

data” (i.e. written responses in online forums) may also fall out of the analytic focus of this book.

The book comprises three main parts, featuring the analytic strategies of narrative studies, conversation analysis, and discourse analysis respectively. Bischooping and Gazso define “analytic strategy” as “careful plans or methods to achieve a goal,” or more specifically, a research objective (2). This broad definition allows them to label many heterogeneous methodological concerns as analytic strategies, ranging from micro-examination of turn-takings of a conversation, to contextualization of discourse(s) in macro-level social changes, approaches to address a researcher’s reflexivity, and methods to strengthen the rigor of a study.

The strength of the book is found in the meticulous attention that the authors, following Guba and Lincoln (1994), give to the consistency of ontology, epistemology, analytic strategy, and the criteria of rigorous analysis. For instance, the authors keenly point out broad-stroke oral history data engenders the positivist-like analysis regarding historical events and individual life trajectory, whereas talk-in-action data direct researchers to detail-oriented conversation analysis in alignment with constructivism. The introduction of analytic strategies is also combined with rich literature surveying the major contributions of the field and hands-on examples illustrating research practice. Debates and tensions among different intellectual traditions are highlighted so that readers can better identify the implications of a researcher’s epistemological stance for analytic practice.

The book would benefit from further considering and addressing two issues. First, it starts with a question of “what is next after data collection,” which jump-starts the discussion of analyzing talk data, but also implicitly prompts an impression that data analysis is a self-sustained realm of practice that can be separated from data collection. The book would be stronger if stronger connections were drawn between data collection and analysis. When collecting data from conversations, a researcher simultaneously starts her interpretation of the data. This process continues in the iterative, reflective and repetitive data collection process, as the researcher jots down field notes, transcribes conversation recordings, and revises her original data collection plan. Second, the authors avoid explicitly spelling out how a researcher should make decisions about which analytic strategy to adopt in their analysis. At first glance, it seems that this question is beyond the scope of this book, as the authors mainly task themselves with elucidating analytic orientations and validity concerns of different research approaches. However, the emphasis on the nature of data leads

readers to wonder whether the characteristics of data should be a primary concern in choosing analytic strategies. It could have been more helpful, especially for novice researchers, if the authors explicitly discussed the major parameters that a researcher should consider when determining the appropriate approach for data analysis.

Regardless of the two limitations discussed above, I still consider *Analyzing Talk in the Social Sciences* a helpful and much-needed guide. Its strength lies in its unique perspective, appropriate use of examples, comprehensive yet concise synthesis of existing literature, and grounded summary of analytic strategies.

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