Feminist Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis – A New Theoretical and Methodological Approach?

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Introduction

In recent years, a number of doctoral and post-doctoral students have begun to explore and experiment with the use of a *new* theoretical and methodological approach to gender and language study: that of Feminist Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA). While there is a growing international interest in the FPDA approach, it is still relatively unknown in the wider community of discourse analysts. There is little published work as yet which directly draws on FPDA, but much fascinating work in the pipeline. At the moment, it is just a small fish in the big sea of discourse analysis; its future is far from certain and it may well be swallowed up whole by larger varieties, or choose to swim with the tide of Critical Discourse Analysis, which to some extent it resembles.

This chapter serves three very important functions within this collection. First, it aims to make the existence of FPDA better known to both gender and language researchers and to the wider community of discourse analysts, by outlining FPDA's own theoretical and methodological approaches. This involves locating and positioning FPDA in relation, yet in contradistinction to, the fields of discourse analysis to which it is most often compared: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and, to a lesser extent, Conversation Analysis (CA). Under this first aim, the chapter actively serves to *evolve* the thinking presented in my book, *Positioning Gender in Discourse* (2003), which sought to define the FPDA approach.

Secondly, the chapter serves a vital *symbolic* function. It aims to contest the authority of the more established theoretical and methodological approaches represented in this collection, which currently dominate the field of discourse analysis. This is a vital function of the post-structuralist approach to theory and methodology. Lesser known methodologies like FPDA offer a *resistant* value in challenging fashionable or entrenched approaches, which tend to transform themselves into 'grand narratives ... grounding truth and meaning in the presumption of a universal subject and a predetermined goal of emancipation' (Elliott, 1996: 19). In Foucault's terms, any paradigm of knowledge, as it becomes more established, inevitably systematises itself into a 'regime of truth' (1980: 109–33). However benign the approach, the 'will to truth' is also 'a will to power'. FPDA considers that an established field like gender and language study will only thrive and develop if it is receptive to new ways of thinking, divergent methods of study, and approaches that question and contest received wisdoms or established methods.

Thirdly, the chapter aims to introduce some new, experimental and ground-breaking FPDA work, including that by Harold Castañeda-Peña and Laurel Kamada (this volume). I indicate the different ways in which a number of young scholars are imaginatively developing the possibilities of an FPDA approach to their specific gender and language projects.

1 FPDA: the theoretical approach

So, what has FPDA new to offer gender and language study in relation to its better known partners of CDA and CA? This is a question I explore at some length elsewhere (Baxter, 2002a; 2003), and it is not my intention to recycle my arguments here. However, since then, I have been challenged at different conferences to justify FPDA as a distinct theoretical and methodological approach in its own right. Doesn't FPDA sound very much like Feminist *Critical* Discourse Analysis in both name and sentiment? Am I not, perhaps, on an empire-building mission to attach my name to a new theoretical approach?

Perhaps the most important response is that FPDA has no interest in competing with other approaches for prospective punters. One of the key values of FPDA is that it offers itself as a 'supplementary' approach, simultaneously complementing and undermining other methods. There is much value to be gained from a *multi-perspectival* approach that combines different methodological tools in a functional way as befits the task in hand. Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) emphasise how multiple viewpoints fit well with the basic constructionist view of 'perspectivism' in bringing together several different theories and methods to create divergent forms of knowledge. Such textual interplay between competing terms, methods and sets of ideas allows for more multiple, open-ended readings, and distinguishes the poststructuralist approach from more modernist versions of

discourse analysis. Castañeda-Peña (Chapter 17) makes FPDA his central approach for analysing the speech of pre-schoolers in Colombia, but also draws upon CA to micro-analyse sequences of conversational turns, as well as applying a CDA critique. Kamada (Chapter 12) combines FPDA with discursive psychology and non-discourse analytic principles, that is, Bourdieu's (1977) theories of cultural and symbolic capital, to analyse the construction of ethnic identities among six Japanese-Caucasian girlfriends.

Of all the leading approaches to discourse analysis in the field, FPDA has most in common with CDA. Yet, FPDA and CDA have quite different theoretical and epistemological orientations. While they share commonalities in theory and methodology, the two approaches arguably have *contrasting* outlooks on the world and seek divergent outcomes. I shall therefore expand on the background to this in order to clarify views I have expressed elsewhere (2002a, 2003). At the 2005 BAAL/CUP Seminar (see Chapter 1), I defined FPDA as:

> an approach to analysing intertextualised discourses in spoken interaction and other types of text. It draws upon the poststructuralist principles of complexity, plurality, ambiguity, connection, recognition, diversity, textual playfulness, functionality and transformation. The *feminist* perspective on post-structuralist discourse analysis considers *gender differentiation* to be a dominant discourse among competing discourses when analysing all types of text. FPDA regards gender differentiation as one of the most pervasive discourses across many cultures in terms of its systematic power to discriminate between human beings according to their gender and sexuality.

(Baxter, 2005)

This definition of FPDA developed from the ideas of the formalist, Bakhtin (1981), and the poststructuralists, Derrida (1987) and Foucault (1980), in relation to power, knowledge and discourses. 'It has also been inspired by the feminist work of Walkerdine (1998), and Weedon (1997), among others. In my empirical research, I have deployed FPDA in relation to classroom spoken interactions, and, more recently, to management meetings and the construction of gendered leadership in the boardroom. I refer briefly to both studies by way of illustration below.

Theoretically, FPDA has definite connections and parallels with current versions of *feminist* CDA (Lazar, 2005a; Caldas-Coulthard, 2003; Wodak, this volume). Here, I recognise that CDA is in no way a monolithic construct, but rather a multidisciplinary perspective drawing upon diverse approaches. As far as it is possible to generalise, both FPDA and feminist versions of CDA share a key principle: *the discursive construction of subjectivity.* Accordingly, such approaches would probably agree on the following elements (which are associated with performativity theory (Butler, 1990)):

- *Discourse as social practice* (rather than, or additional to, 'language above the sentence' or as 'language in use' (Cameron, 2001)).
- *The performative (rather than essentialist or possessive) nature of speakers' identities*; gender is something people enact or do, not something they *are* or *characterise.*
- *The diversity and multiplicity of speakers' identities*: thus, gender is just one of many cultural variables constructing speakers' identities (e.g., regional background, ethnicity, class, age), though it is still viewed as potentially highly significant.
- *The construction of meaning within localised or context-specific settings or communities of practice* such as classrooms, board meetings, TV talk shows.
- *An interest in deconstruction*: working out how binary power relations (e.g., males/females, public/private, objective/subjective) constitute identities, subject positions and interactions within discourses and texts, and challenging such binaries.
- *Inter-discursivity*: recognising ways in which one discourse is always inscribed and inflected with traces of other discourses, or how one text is interwoven with another.
- *The need for continuous self-reflexivity*: being continuously explicit and questioning about the values and assumptions made by discourse analysis.

If this is the case, wherein lies the difference? CDA follows a tradition from post-Marxism through cultural materialism to critical linguistics, critical theory, literary theory, and other branches such as genre studies and discursive psychology. Common to this tradition is an explicit emphasis upon emancipatory social theory on behalf of dominated and oppressed groups (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Early versions of CDA were broadly cultural materialist in outlook (e.g., Fairclough, 1995). More recent CDA, however, as defined by scholars such as Caldas-Coulthard, 1996, and Wodak, this volume), have defined it in more social constructionist or even

poststructuralist terms. For example, Wodak (2001a: 9) cites the Duisburg School of CDA as 'massively influenced by Michel Foucault's theories' in terms of its view that discourses are historically founded, socially constitutive and always interwoven.

Nevertheless, FPDA has its theoretical roots firmly in postmodernism rather than post-Marxism, and its quest is epistemological rather than ideological. This has three key implications which in *my* view makes FPDA fundamentally different from CDA:

- *FPDA does not have an emancipatory agenda, but a 'transformative quest'.*

This is not just juggling with words. While CDA has an avowedly ideological agenda committed to focusing on social problems and working on behalf of the oppressed (e.g., Wodak, 2001a), FPDA cannot support any agenda that, in Foucault's terms (1980: 109), may become 'a will to truth' and therefore 'a will to power'. In other words, FPDA cannot support a political or indeed, a theoretical mission which might one day become its own 'grand narrative'.

On the other hand, according to post-structuralist principles (Foucault, 1984: 46), FPDA can support small-scale, bottom-up, localised social transformations that are vital in its larger quest to challenge dominant discourses (like gender differentiation) that inevitably become grand narratives. In line with Bakhtin's (1981) ideas on heteroglossia, FPDA means giving space to marginalised or silenced voices (such as certain girls who say little in classroom settings, or those women whose voices are overlooked or silenced in management settings). So as a methodological approach, FPDA is thus best suited to small-scale, ethnographic case studies in which subjects have some degree of agency to change their conditions:

- *FPDA believes in complexity rather than polarisation of subjects of study.*

Because CDA has an emancipatory agenda, it has tended on occasions to polarise subjects of study into two categories – the *more* powerful: those (people, groups, systems) who wield power over others, and the *less* powerful, or those who suffer its abuse. This dichotomised attitude is illustrated in van Dijk's answer to the question, 'What is CDA?':

> CDA research combines what perhaps somewhat pompously used to be called 'solidarity with the oppressed' with an attitude of opposition and dissent against those who abuse text and talk in order to establish, confirm or legitimate their abuse of power ... that is, CDA is biased – and proud of it.

> (2001: 96)

CDA's critique is often therefore a binary one in that it is directed *against* those institutional discourses that tend to serve hegemonic interests, and it is working *for* the various social groups whose interests are peripheralised by such dominant discourses. In terms of gender and language studies, CDA is concerned to target and deconstruct patriarchal or masculinist discourses on behalf of 'oppressed' social groups such as women or homosexuals (e.g., Lazar, 2005a).

FPDA, on the other hand, challenges ways in which modernist thinking tends to structure thoughts in oppositional pairs, placing one term over the other. Centring the marginal and marginalising the central, as CDA purports to do – 'a perspective that is consistent with the best interests of dominated groups' (van Dijk, 2001: 96) – itself creates another hierarchy that requires overturning. (There are, of course, notable exceptions to this binary pattern in CDA research. Wagner and Wodak's (2006) study of powerful women, for example, points to the complexity and ambiguity of female leadership identities.) Equally, FPDA is concerned *not* to polarise males as villains and females as victims in any oppositional sense, nor even to presume that women as a category are necessarily powerless, disadvantaged or oppressed by 'the other'. Rather, it argues that female subject positions are complex, shifting and multiply located. It suggests that the ceaseless interaction of competing discourses means that speakers will continuously fluctuate between subject positions on a matrix of powerfulness and powerlessness. This shift can happen across a range of *different* speech events, within a single speech context, or literally *within* a few moments of interaction. It can even happen *simultaneously*; for example, being powerful or powerless in different ways at the same moment in time. So at this micro-level, FPDA can help analysts to pinpoint an exact moment in discourse when a speaker shifts between states of relative powerfulness and powerlessness. The approach also helps to explain the complex pattern of discoursal relations that produce such sudden and dramatic shifts of power.

- *FPDA is anti-materialist in tendency.*

CDA assumes discourse to work *dialectically* (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) in so far as the discursive event is shaped by, and thereby continuously reconstructs, 'real' or 'material' events, situations or structures. FPDA, on the other hand, adopts an *anti*-materialist stance in its view that social realities are always discursively produced. In other words – and this is the contentious bit – speakers do not exist outside discourse. From the moment we are born, we enter a social world that is infused by competing discourses. We make sense of our existence through such discourses – pre-existing knowledge systems which constantly mediate our thoughts and experiences. In Foucault's (1972: 49) terms, discourses operate as 'practices that systematically form the object of which they speak'. This means that a stretch of speech or talk is continuously reconstructed or reproduced *through* discourse, never outside it. So CDA's distinction between text and context (Fairclough, 1995a) is collapsed by FPDA in favour of the concept of interdiscursivity, where one discourse is always negotiated, challenged, evolved and adjusted through the lens of other discourses.

Does this mean that for post-structuralist discourse analysts, material reality does not exist? This was debated at the BAAL/CUP Seminar after the FPDA papers were presented, and it is worth answering more formally here. My own view – not necessarily shared by all feminist post-structuralists – is that *of course* material reality exists. If a woman experiences physical pain at childbirth, this pain is a material state. But the experience of enduring pain in childbirth is never felt or understood except through cultural and social discourses about childbirth pain, which classify and categorise these experiences. The often-intense physical feelings produced by childbirth are inseparable from the cultural forms of expression by which women process that pain – as inevitable, beneficial, containable, or whatever. This may be further mediated, or complicated, by the mixed messages – or contradictory discourses – that different cultures produce about the experience of female pain. This in itself is bound up with issues of power relations, which offer women competing subject positions about how to make sense of pain – some relatively powerful, many far less so. For FPDA, this is not, as CDA would have it, a dialectical process (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). The personal experience of pain is culturally embedded and constituted in competing and often contradictory ways. So, for example, counter-discourses on childbirth pain such as those promoted by The National Childbirth Trust in Britain have reconstructed the experience not as a medical condition which needs to be controlled, classified and treated by expert obstetricians, but as a joyous, 'natural' occasion, over which pregnant women should be allowed maximum choice, control and involvement. This once resistant discourse has increasingly become more mainstream and therefore approved, within medical practices in Britain. Whether women now experience childbirth pain differently, even reconstituting it as a joyous or celebratory set of sensations, is almost impossible to 'prove' using conventional research methods, but personal testaments suggest it may be so (Talbot, 1998).

What the anti-materialist approach means for FPDA at least is that research practices are themselves always highly discoursal and textualised. FPDA thus draws attention to the constructedness of its own conceptual framework and 'foundational rhetoric' in relation to its subject of study. In line with feminist ethnography (Middleton, 1993), FPDA takes the principle of self-reflexivity one step further than CDA might do, by likening the textualising process of research to a *literary form*. In other words, the business of text-making will constitute the analyst as literally an *author* with a certain control over his or her work. But this 'control' is tempered by hegemonic constraints: the number of subject positions made available to authors/ researchers by the conventions of academic research and publishing practices is limited.

To bring this down to earth, I may *want* to conduct my FPDA research in the spirit of Derrida's (1987) textual playfulness and Barthes's (1977) 'writerly' practices, but the dominant version of academic reality says that I must produce some closure to my arguments to satisfy the demands of peer review research practice. The least I can do, as a self-reflexive researcher, is to make the *constructedness* of this whole process more transparent and explicit.

So far, this chapter has focused on clarifying the theoretical principles of FPDA in order to demonstrate its distinctive approach to gender and language study; and on indicating the symbolic value of this lesser known theoretical approach as a force for resistance. In order to complete these aims, I now turn to what is distinctive about FPDA's methodology by considering two features by way of example: sources of data, and textual analysis. Again, my discussion here aims to evolve and move forward my original case on FPDA methodology (Baxter, 2003).

2 FPDA: the methodological approach

2.1 The use of data

FPDA has developed an approach to data that differs significantly from mainstream approaches to discourse analysis. First, while established approaches such as CA and CDA generally offer a unitary perspective of the data by single or multiple authors, FPDA aims to provide *multiple* voices and accounts in accordance with Bakhtin's (1981) principle of 'polyphony'. This effectively means providing space in a discourse analysis for the coexistence of distinctively different voices and accounts, such as those of the research participants, other researchers on the project, and possibly even people who review and comment on the research. If these different voices and accounts can be juxtaposed with a minimum of the usual interweaving authorial comments, they can then make their own comments by *supplementing* each other.

The polyphonic approach to data dovetails with a second methodological feature: competing voices and accounts according to Bakhtin's (1981) principle of 'heteroglossia'. This aims to include *minority* voices alongside more official and openly recognised accounts in order to make space for voices that would otherwise be silenced. This might literally be the representation of people who never speak. In my classroom study (Baxter, 2003), I foregrounded the voices of certain 15-year-old girls who rarely spoke in class, and were damningly considered 'good listeners'. In my management study (Baxter, 2003), I highlighted the voice of a female personal assistant whose institutional position determined that she should never speak at meetings. My purpose was to enable her to express her views alongside those of her six male and one female bosses, because she was clearly an essential presence within the management team. 'Heteroglossia' is thus a post-structuralist principle for both data collection and presentation that produces a particular range, richness and plurality of meanings.

2.2 Textual analysis

A key aspect of FPDA, like CDA, is the identification and naming of significant discourses within spoken and written texts. Conversation analysts (e.g., Widdicombe, 1995) have rightly asked other (critical) discourse analysts for their 'warrant' for naming specific discourses in their studies, suggesting that at times CDA seems to generate random discourses to suit their ideological purposes. This is commented on by Sunderland (2004), who has drawn up a list of discourses which have been named and identified by Critical discourse analysts, amongst others. But the fact that discourses are thus identified does not mean that they *exist*, except in the written text of the analyst who coined their names.

CA, in contrast, bases its own warrants on its claim that any larger patterns it detects in micro-analyses of 'talk-in-interaction', such as evidence of gendered behaviour, can always (and only) be located, turn by turn, within specific speech exchanges. This is not an approach that Critical Discourse analysts have traditionally deployed – there has been a tendency on their side to see a discourse as simply 'out there' waiting to be 'bird-spotted' through a combination of socially informed intuition, critical judgement and supporting textual analysis. That discourse is then often taken 'on trust' and applied as a research category to the critique of other texts. Such a discourse may well be widely recognised by communities of analysts, but CA would argue whether it has been identified and named through the application of rigorous and retrievable research methods. In its defence, CDA would posit the importance of analysts' insights as members of society, who self-reflexively acknowledge the constructedness of their categorisations of discourse (Billig, 2000).

FPDA suggests that both a *synchronic* and a *diachronic approach* to this methodological issue might be the answer to the question of what counts as a discourse. Its *diachronic* or ethnographic perspective analyses the language of a particular social group over a longish period of time. This allows for recording overall patterns and developments in the discursive relationships of a given social group. In my management study (Baxter, 2003; 2006b), I observed and recorded the spoken interactions of a group of managers over several months, charting the ways in which working relationships evolved and changed. It was only over this period of time that it became obvious to me (and the other research participants) that there existed organised patterns of speech and behaviour that were discursively shaped by particular versions of reality. In the end, the choice of a name to be attached to these identified 'discourses' is clearly subjective and interpretive, but such a bank of ethnographic evidence, shared by a given community of practice, supports their presumed existence.

The second, synchronic aspect is a detailed, micro-analysis of stretches of text associated with a particular speech event, and is very much in line with CA. My own approach (Baxter, 2003) borrows from the semiotic and literary stylistic methods of Barthes (1977), Eco (1990) and others. Parallel methods are increasingly being

explored by Critical Discourse analysts interested in written and multi-modal communication (e.g., see Koller, this volume). The FPDA approach to micro-analysis works on two levels: *denotative* and *connotative* (Barthes, 1977). On the first level, the denotative aims to describe the verbal and non-verbal interactions of a social group in close, but basically non-evaluative detail. Here, the methods of CA provide useful tools in giving a relatively uncontroversial *description* of events. On the second level, the 'connotative' analysis aims to *interpret* the data according to the ways in which speakers are constantly jockeying for positions of power according to competing and intertextualised discourses. (Here, I have adapted the original semiotic meanings of denotation/connotation for the purposes of analysing speech data.) In my management study (Baxter, 2003), I plotted in two 'discourse maps' interrelationships between four key discourses which seemed to be shaping the experiences of this management team. The first map, *discourse combination*, showed how institutional discourses can work together to shape the team's sense of reality in mutually productive ways. The second map, *discourse tension*, showed how the same discourses can also compete with each other, creating a site of struggle within the team.

This plotting of discourses is not just an academic exercise; it can have a functional and practical outcome in the world – always of key importance to the FPDA quest. The discourse maps were used by the management team to confront some of the difficulties in their professional relationships, and encouraged individuals, both male and female, to negotiate some of their gender-stereotyped assumptions. Ultimately, the discourse maps allowed for an important transformation to happen in the business practices of this group: these managers gained a clearer understanding of both their shared aspirations and competing interests, enabling them to resolve conflicts and work together more harmoniously as a team.

3. FPDA work in the pipeline

I suggested at the start of this chapter that, while there is a growing international interest in FPDA, especially among junior scholars, it is still a relatively unknown approach in the wider community of discourse analysts. Since the publication of my book in 2003, a number of doctoral and postdoctoral students around the world have begun to explore FPDA in their own projects. Little of this work is as yet published. I shall now therefore introduce the work of the five speakers who attended the BAAL/CUP seminar in 2005, of whom Harold Castañeda-Peña, is represented in this section, and Laurel Kamada[1] in the Discursive Psychology section, drawing upon their own words and descriptions of their work (denoted by quote marks). In different ways, each scholar has subjected the FPDA approach to test, and have adapted and extended its methodology to suit their own purposes.

Laurel Kamada aims to 'embellish' existing notions of FPDA by incorporating the factor of *ethnic* subjectivity into the 'mix' of competing discourses she examines. She includes ethnicity alongside gender in her exploration of how multi-ethnic, Japanese-Caucasian girls are simultaneously positioned as relatively powerful and powerless within a range of dominant discourses. Kamada reports how she is able to produce analyses of the conversations among the six girls by combining both longer term, 'diachronic' and moment-specific, 'synchronic' methods. Her focus is 'embodiment': how individual girls make sense of themselves through the way they discursively position themselves and others based on their 'livedbody- selves' – not only how they speak together, but how they enact the 'body work' of friendship: teasing, touching and laughter. Kamada demonstrates how the girls work to construct their identities within and across competing discourses of ethnicity, arguing that 'FPDA has been shown to have an application wider than just gender studies and can well answer the theoretical and methodological needs in a broad range of social science, linguistics and discursive fields of research.'

Surin Kaur (2005) draws primarily upon Performativity theory in her work-in-progress on the performances of gendered identities in online discussion boards. Her hypothesis is that gender is a series of repetitious acts, bodily and discursive, that are imposed upon people by normative discursive definitions of gender and sexuality. However, she argues that Performativity theory on its own is not able to show us what is actually happening because of the levels of abstraction at which it works. Her supplementary use of FPDA allows for the detailed *textual* examination of the discourses that continuously compete with each other in the performance of gender – enactments of gender that allow members of online discussion boards to take up multiple and sometimes conflicting subject positions. Kaur notes that one of the key points of 'intersection' between Performativity theory and FPDA is a specifically functional one. The combination of these frameworks provides an 'ensemble of tools' necessary to analyse the ways in which gender is performed in cyberspace. FPDA in particular provides the methodology for a detailed linguistic analysis of the ways in which members of virtual communities negotiate ambiguous and complex positions for themselves, which would be far less possible to sustain in the 'material' world. FPDA provides the tools to analyse these 'virtual' relationships that are ephemeral, constantly shifting, and subject to dispersal.

Harold Castañeda-Peña analyses the social construction of gender identities through a case study of Colombian pre-schoolers learning English as a foreign language. Castañeda-Peña carried out ethnographic, qualitative research into the classroom speech and behaviour of his research participants, which gave him time to build up a dossier of evidence on the existence of particular classroom discourses. He finds that FPDA offers a very specific, focused micro-analytical tool to locate the ways in which a number of gendered discourses operate intertextually to situate the pre-schoolers' voices within the classroom interaction. He notes how the pre-schoolers, both male and female, are never uniformly powerful or powerless, but constantly shift between different subject positions in relation to the different discourses, sometimes between one conversational turn and the next. He suggests that FPDA 'seems to open a new self-reflexive theoretical framework to the study of the interface of gender, EFL learning and early childhood education', in his view a highly under-researched area. Castañeda-Peña's development of a sequential, turn-by-turn denotative analysis, building on CA methods, also advances the approach used in my own work (2003, 2002a,) by focusing on how conversations can be co-constructed between participants.

Tamara Warhol (2005) is developing methods of FPDA to investigate how students at an American, non-denominational, divinity school learn 'exegesis': the interpretation (in this case) of biblical texts – suggesting that FPDA can be equally applicable to written as well as spoken texts. Drawing on Bakhtin (1981), Warhol argues that all utterances are dialogical in nature; they cannot be read or heard in isolation. Instead, they respond to utterances that precede them and anticipate utterances that will respond to them. Meaning is not found in one text alone, but amidst a dialogue of interacting voices. Any original text, such as a version of the Bible, will be re-inflected by new voices. Through a close, micro-analysis of spoken transcripts, Warhol shows that in one seminar, the exegesis of Galatians 1:11–24 by a group of students and their teacher, presents multiple voices: the characters *within* the biblical text; the voices of theological scholars *outside* the text; and the voices of the seminar participants themselves. Warhol adds her own voice to this mix, and suggests that readers of her papers will add their supplementary voices to the exegesis process. Thus, 'an infinite number of voices echo through the interpretation of the biblical text'. Warhol therefore uses FPDA to challenge the modernist quest of much current theological teaching that seeks closure by deriving a single, correct meaning from a text, presumed to be that of the author. Warhol advances the approach by showing how FPDA can be used to analyse multi-voiced, heteroglossic, *written* texts such as the Bible, and, more importantly to analyse how students make sense of these competing accounts in their seminar discussions.

Finally, Gabrielle Budach (2005), currently completing an ethnographic study of three literacy centres in Ontario, Canada, is interested in the connections between language, gender and speech community. Such literacy centres are part of a francophone network designed to improve the literacy skills and political confidence of monolingual, French speakers in Canada: they thus represent an important site for the construction and contestation of social meanings, including debates on what counts as legitimate language capital and who counts as francophone. On one hand, the centres are represented by their management as a space organised and primarily run in the interests of francophone women; on the other, both learners and outsiders perceive the centres as unnecessarily excluding of men, and French/English bilingual speakers in general. While drawing on a number of theoretical paradigms, Budach finds FPDA valuable in its role as an 'additional' methodology, offering an 'alternative' set of strategies to CA and CDA, in the spirit of FPDA (cf. Baxter, 2003: 44). Furthermore, she uses a number of 'biographic interviews' of managers, teachers and learners to display the plurality of voices and perspectives on this issue. While Budach does not use discourse analysis as such, she does juxtapose extracts from her interview extracts to illustrate the competing and discordant accounts of her subjects. The principle of poststructuralism, in Budach's words is that 'there are no fixed meanings once and for all, but contestations and redefinitions revealed by different readings within different contexts'. Her contrastive analysis of various case studies points to heterogeneity and tension inside the literacy centres arising from different life experiences and attitudes to language – despite the managerial representation of the institution as 'a homogeneous gendered space'.

3. Conclusion

It has been my intention in this chapter to make FPDA, and its manifestations in current scholarship, a little better known to the wider community of discourse analysts and gender and language researchers. Does FPDA offer a new theoretical and methodological approach to gender and language study ? I propose that it does so in the following five ways:

- FPDA draws attention to the provisional, constructed nature of all research and to its status as a textualising and fictionalising practice.

- It is concerned to widen the range of possible meanings by challenging the notion of the single authorial account: it should offer space for competing voices and diverse accounts of experience and resist a single line of argument or closure.
- FPDA explores the differences within and between girls/women including their experiences of the complexities and ambiguities of power. In refusing to constitute gender in binary terms, FPDA offers a potentially empowering and celebratory vision.
- It aims to support transformative feminist processes provided these are specific, localised, action-driven, functional and temporary.
- FPDA offers a 'supplementary' approach to the 'grand narratives' expounded by the established schools of discourse analysis represented in this volume: CDA and CA (as well as Interactional Sociolinguistics). This means that it can be effective as an *additional* methodology, offering an *alternative* set of strategies alongside any of the more well-known approaches.

FPDA may just be a small fish in a big sea, but, vulnerable as this makes it, this is also its position of strength. As a theoretical and methodological approach, FPDA has a mandate to contest grand narratives; it is not concerned to found a new school of discourse analysis. At the moment I consider FPDA as a vital antidote to the increasing institutional power of both CA and CDA. As Billig (2000) has said, CDA must be prepared to open up possibilities for new forms of discourse analysis that 'expose the self-interest and political economy of the sign, "critical" '. I consider that FPDA does exactly that.

Note

1 Laurel Kamada adopts a multi-perspectival approach to her work, which draws upon discursive psychology, CDA and FPDA.