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Introducing Positioning Theory in Regional Integration Studies

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Abstract

This paper proposes a constructionist and discursive approach and methodology for studying regional integration and related issues, such as cooperation between states, the formation of transnational regions as actors in governance, and identity and social cohesion. First, the paper presents an alternative ontology for social science. Positioning theory is then introduced as an analytical framework that highlights the meanings attributed to spaces, to persons seen as representing those spaces, as well as the social tasks accomplished through their communications and interactions. This social-psychological perspective is of theoretical and practical use, as it illuminates possibilities for change in conception and action. A brief discussion of validity and reliability criteria for the new framework is offered, and Foresight is suggested as a congruent methodology due to its participatory, prospective, and active orientation. Finally, some broader implications of the approach are explored, and future research directions are suggested.

Key words: region, integration, positioning, social science, identity.

Introduction

This paper proposes a new discursive approach and methodology for studying issues such as cooperation between states, the formation of transnational regions as actors in governance, and

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identity and social cohesion. The main upshot is that a constructivist and discursive approach to integration studies, based upon positioning theory, can be developed that is of theoretical and practical use. A positioning theory perspective highlights the social functions served, and the social tasks accomplished, in social interactions and how people accomplish these social tasks through the use of symbols in their communications. When applied to regional integration, positioning theory emphasizes the meaning that people attribute to (geographic) spaces (e.g. states, micro-regions, macro-regions), to persons seen as representing those spaces (including their duties and rights), as well as to the interactions between them.

A linguistic and constructivist turn in integration studies

Regional integration has traditionally fallen under the umbrella of studies in international relations (IR), which focuses on the actions of states in their complex relationships with each other. For many years, the dominant theoretical views in IR have been realism, liberalism and their neo-versions (cf. Baldwin, 1993). From a methodological point of view, it has to be noted that IR presents itself not as a discipline within the social sciences, but as a field of study that requires the insight and methods of a number of disciplines. However, in practice I.R. has been more or less isolated from the other social sciences: theories and methods from disciplines such as psychology, sociology or economy have hardly penetrated the field.

Due to its global proliferation, regional integration has become one of the most prominent issues of study within the field of IR (cf. Pelkmans, 2001 and Chrysochoo, 2001 for recent overviews), and European integration is arguably the most prominent case. The field

deals with: a) how and why there is a gradual upward shifting of sovereignty from the state level to macro-regional structures, like the European Commission and the European Parliament (political integration); and b) why and how the elimination of economic frontiers between two or more economies occurs (economic integration). In the scientific study of regional integration social constructionism has recently become rather popular (see: Checkel, 1998; Christiansen et al, 1999; Moravscik, 1999; Ruggie, 1998). A growing group of scholars uses theories, ideas and methods related to the social constructionism movement to tackle problems of international relations and international law pertaining to political and economic integration. A central focus in this approach is to study the constitution of political identity. While the dominant schools of thought in IR take identity as exogenously given and beyond scope of analysis, the social constructionist literature tries to incorporate the dynamics of identity formation into IR theory. In doing so, social constructionism is often quoted as an alternative to neo-realist or functionalist approaches. A pioneer of such an approach is Wendt (1999), who presented a version of Symbolic Interactionism as a theory of the international system as a social construction. Nonetheless, he meanwhile maintained that states and state systems are “real” structures whose nature can be approximated by a positivist scientific approach.

As exemplified by Wendt’s writings, much of the purportedly social constructionist literature on RI hardly takes into account that the social constructionist turn in the social sciences is also related to a post-positivism turn. Despite certain efforts, much of this literature can be criticized as a) paying mainly lip service to social constructionism, b) not taking into account social constructionist literature in fields such as psychology and linguistics, where this literature is

most advanced, and c) not being able to generate new insights or new research agendas. In order to really apply modern social constructionist thinking to regional integration, we advocate that a) regional integration studies need to take a discursive turn and in doing so, b) existing theoretical approaches, such as positioning theory (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999), can be used to “open” regional integration studies to insights from other disciplines and to a more empirical approach (Slocum & Van Langenhove, in press).

The social constructionist and linguistic approaches emphasize the impact of intersubjectivity and social context on the continuing process of (European) integration. If the social and discursive contexts of integration processes are taken as the primary topics of study, then social constructionist approaches can contribute to formulating a coherent framework to study integration that incorporates:

- i) studying the *rules and norms* and *rights and duties* related to integration processes;
- ii) studying the *formation* and *functions* of discursive tools (such as the concept of identity) that are employed in talk about integration; and
- iii) studying the relationship between *discursive aspects of integration processes* and related *actions*.

In developing such a linguistic turn to regional integration studies, we want to introduce the concept of “*integration speak*” (Slocum & Van Langenhove, in press). This term refers to all of the ways in which issues of regional integration are presented, be it in written or spoken form. We are using the term in much the same way as Harré, Brockmeier and Mühlhäuser (1999) have used the concept of “green speak” in their seminal study of environmental discourse. Integration speak is about how the different issues of regional integration are constructed, represented and negotiated in different sorts of discourses by different actors. For example, one specific form of integration speak is “Euro-speak” (Diez, 1999): the purposely-built vocabulary of terms to describe – and shape – the reality of the European Union. Such Euro-speak includes concepts such as “subsidiarity”, “democratic deficit”, “the third pillar”, “the deepening and widening”, and so forth. Thus, rather than attempting to provide a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that define integration speak terms, such as “regions”, “integration” or “identity”, we examine what these discursive tools are used to *do* in various contexts (Wittgenstein, 1953; Austin, 1961). This approach is based upon a philosophy of (social) science that is fundamentally different from that of the positivist and thus concomitantly requires a fundamentally different methodology.

Studying Mass versus Meaning

According to the positivist paradigm, science should only aim to study that which can be directly observed and measured. Knowledge about anything beyond that, a positivist would hold, is impossible. Therefore, emotions, thoughts, and all concepts such as “identity”, “sovereignty”, “nation”, and so forth, were not considered legitimate topics for science. The aim

of positivistic science was too identify cause and effect mechanisms so that the environment could be predicted and controlled. Therefore, the methodology of the positivist was to use experiments in which certain variables were purportedly isolated and manipulated while all other variables were held constant.

Although arguably appropriate for studying the subjects of Newtonian mechanics, the positivist is forced to confront the limits of his experimental methodology, and the theoretical principles upon which it is based, at the very latest when addressing the quantum realm. While the already inadequate for the physical realm, positivist theory and methodology are utterly inappropriate for addressing the social realm. Constituted by meaning-laden concepts, processes, stories and images, the social realm has none of the “directly observable and measurable” characteristics to which positivism limits its scientific endeavor. The social scientist aims to address the ephemeral and murkier, yet arguably often more consequential realm of the social-psychological. Naturally, this realm is related to but distinct from the physical realm.

As social scientists, we are in the business of searching for systematic explanations for social interactions and their consequences. In attempting to explain human (inter-)actions, we must analytically distinguish between two components that constitute them. The first is the material component – the material, or physical reality – which can be divided into three subcategories:

- (a) Objects, such as the two twin towers that used to stand in Manhattan, or a flag;
- (b) Unintentional behaviors, such as reflexes (blinking, sneezing) and snoring; and

- (c) Intentional actions, such as shaking someone’s hand or uttering the words, “Well done”.

These categories are the primary concern of the physical sciences, and they play only a subordinate role in the social sciences. As the subject matter differs of the social and physical sciences differ, so too must their methods. It is inappropriate to try to quantify and measure a concept, such as “identity” or “region-ness” or “integration”. To do so would be to commit the error of *reification*. To reify is to regard something abstract as material or concrete.³ “Identity”, “university”, “nation” and “region” are not material things like a hat or a wine bottle.

The second component of human interactions is the metaphysical component, which we will call *meaning* (Bruner, 1990). It is built upon the elements of the first (See Table 1). Objects, when given meanings, become symbols or signs, such as the significance given to the UN flag as a symbol of world peace. The twin towers of the World Trade Center were to some a symbol of western financial success and power, and to others it was a symbol of corrupt materialism and hegemony. The intentional action of shaking someone’s hand can mean that a greeting is being accomplished or a bet is being made.

INSERT HERE: Table 1: Examples of physical and metaphysical components of reality.

As Wittgenstein (1953) reminded us, not all of language is referential; words do not always refer to things or even to concepts. Rather, language is used to accomplish social tasks.

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With the phrase, “Thank you”, I can express gratitude; the utterance “Dinner is served” can be an *invitation* to take a seat or a *request* that someone pour the first-course wine. These are verbal *actions*. When speaking about integration, one can also do things, like make a promise or issue a warning. For example, Jean-Marie Le Pen warns his audience of the EU and Germans in the following passage:

The same people who are in favour of quickie divorces are trying to weld together the ancient nations of Europe in a perpetual marriage. What are they going to do if we want to leave the EU? Send in the Wehrmacht? The Germans suffered a lot at the end of the war. It was their own fault, of course. But now they want to take their revenge, and so Europe will be dominated by Germany, America’s most obedient ally.⁴

It should be noted that generally, people do not give meanings to unintentional behaviours. We will refer to meaningful actions, both verbal and non-verbal, as *acts*. In examining social interactions, we are mostly concerned with actions and *acts*, or the functions that actions serve.

So what is meaning, exactly? We all know what meaning “is”, in that we are capable of reacting to an extended hand by extending our own, if we want to greet someone; that is, we know what that action “means”, what it accomplishes socially. But how can we explain meaning in a systematic, or scientific, manner? We can measure and find *explanations* for physical

⁴ *The Telegraph*. 25 April 2002. Inside the world of Jean-Marie Le Pen.

events (using theories and laws from biology, physiology, macro-physics); but how can we *explain* meaning? First, we need to identify the type of scientific explanation that is appropriate to our subject.

An approach to social science that accords persons intentionality, as does the one presently advocated, does not attempt to search for explanations and theories that predict behaviour in a deterministic way. Rather, it searches for explanations that usefully illuminate what actors are doing, how they do it, and the social consequences that arise from their actions. Because meanings are continuously created and re-created in discourse (using actions and objects), it makes sense to focus on discourse to discover the components of meaning and how they are engendered. In studying meaning, it is important to remember that there is no deterministic relationship between actions and acts (meanings), nor are the meanings “attached” to actions and acts static. Therefore, the kind of scientific explanations we require to explain meanings are functional explanations, as opposed to causal or structural explanations. The criteria for validity of such explanations are based upon their utility and *not* upon claims to exclusivity against other theories, which also may provide useful explanations that illuminate different aspects of social interactions.

Types of Scientific Explanation

A brief typology of scientific explanations will prove useful. *Causal* theories explain transitions in states by hypothesizing causal connections; they answer the question of how a state of affairs came to be. For example, the question, “What happens when water evaporates?”

requests a causal explanation. *Structural* theories describe the material composition of an entity, answering a question about what something is made of. The natures of substances are invoked to explain their attributes. ‘What is water made of?’ begs a structural explanation that will elucidate the chemical composition of hydrogen and oxygen. In contrast, *functional* theories are *analytic* and explain how something functions for a system. The concept of function is not necessarily teleological, because things often serve functions without having been specifically designed for them. Functional explanations are not to be confused with the functionalist perspective, which claims that things exist *because* they serve a particular purpose (Azevedo, 1994). Functionalist explanations answer questions about how properties, or “dispositions,” occur. It turns out that structural explanations can be either causal or functional, but the distinction is imperative because a correlation between structures and functions is often absent. For example, mental capacities can be broken down into other less complex capacities, but none of these are capacities of localized components of the brain (Azevedo, 1994: 161).

Azevedo (1997) notes that,

The concentration of analyses of scientific methodology and explanation on the methods of causal subsumption has led to the conflation of analysis with subsumption, and a lot of ignorance with respect to the methodology of analysis” (pp. 159-159).

Whereas causal theories employ the method of subsumption in order to explain transitions, functional theories aim to explain dispositions with the method of systems analysis followed by

instantiation. In addition, the ontological status of functional components is distinctive: whereas the entities of causal theories have specific spatio-temporal coordinates, those of functional theories have no spatio-temporal location that can be defined more specifically than the system as a whole (Azevedo, 1997).

Positioning Theory provides a functional explanation for meaning. In so doing, it focuses our attention on the discourse between persons, because it is in discourse that people create and re-create meanings. We will now present the discursive ontology proposed by positioning theory.

Positioning Theory

An ontology for the study of meaning

All scientific endeavor posits an ontology, or a theory about the nature of being —the kinds of existents and their relationships. Intrinsic to positivism is the Newtonian ontology, in which objects and events, located in space and time, are the focus of study, and causality is their presumed relationship. In contrast, positioning theory proposes a discursive ontology, according to which the relevant components to be studied are speech acts, positions and storylines. The components of these two ontologies can be contrasted, as displayed in Table 2.

INSERT HERE: Table 2: Two Ontologies (Adapted from Harré & Gillett, 1994: 29)

The “entities” of discourse are speech acts, as defined by their social forces, or what people accomplish in issuing an utterance. In order to achieve a social force, people employ discursive resources that are constrained by norms and conventions regarding how they are to be used. People draw upon their (implicit) knowledge of such conventions in order to make speech acts determinate in specific situations.

The “locations” of speech acts are arrays of actors. However, the geographical and temporal location of an actor who issues an utterance is not so relevant to the social force of a speech act (Harré & Gillett, 1994). Rather, one’s beliefs about certain aspects of persons involved in a conversation, including oneself, are central to how one understands what has been said, that is its social force (Davies & Harré, 1999). These relevant aspects of persons have been termed “positions,” and can be classified into two main—and inter-related—types:

Type A Positions: a cluster of rights (right to defend oneself), duties (to take proper care of one’s children) and obligations (to pay taxes) with respect to the social acts available to a person so positioned.

Type B Positions: a cluster of psychological (incompetent), social (uncouth) and moral (unreliable) attributes and dispositions.

With (the social force of) discursive acts, people *position* themselves and each other. Referring back to the quote of Le Pen: By issuing this warning Le Pen gives the impression that he is protecting the people from the EU. In other words, in issuing this locution, he herewith *positions* himself as protector and the EU as a danger or threat. We will elaborate below on the three

components of the positioning triad, including the concept of positions and how people position themselves and each other.

The relationship between speech acts is not one of causation, as one speech act does not cause another. Rather, one speech act makes the next normatively accountable, that is appropriate or inappropriate according to conventions. The main type of convention that orders speech acts into a coherent relationship is the storyline. A storyline is that which the participants of discursive episode understand to be ‘going on,’ or what sort of situation they are engaged in.

The components of the positioning triad are mutually influential, as described in detail in the following sections. Here, it is important to note that speech acts index positions and storylines: they are “created” in the process of discursive activity. The words the speaker chooses contain images, metaphors, and other discursive resources that invoke ways of being (e.g. positions and storylines) that are often taken for granted by the interlocutors, but can be challenged (Davies & Harré, 1999). In other words, the components of the positioning triad are immanent in the discursive practices themselves – they do not “cause” them or “represent” them. This acknowledgment highlights two common fallacies in narrative analysis: the ontological fallacy and the representation fallacy (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001). To commit the ontological fallacy is to reify the narrative category, that is, to believe that there is a “real” storyline “out there,” waiting to be excavated. Related to this is the representational fallacy, which is the assumption of an independent reality that is to be represented in a more or less accurate

narrative description. No storylines are correct or incorrect, and there is no “real” storyline somewhere, with which we could compare them.

In accordance with these immanentist insights, the type of functional analysis that is relevant to our discursive ontology is systematic and interpretive, as opposed to morphological and descriptive (Cummins, 1983). As a systematic analysis, the explanatory force derives from a specification of how the analyzing functions interact in a systematic way to transform inputs. As an interpretive analysis, the inputs and outputs of the system are symbolic, rather than physical, descriptions. This classification has implications for how the proposed components of the system are to be instantiated, which is one of the validity requirements. We will discuss validity and reliability criteria later; first we would like to present positioning theory in greater detail and examine how it can usefully illuminate ‘what is going on’, the social realities be created, in discourse. Here, we will examine the (broad) discourse that is encompassed by the topic of “regional integration”. We can refer to this as “integration speak” (Slocum and van Langenhove, in press).

The positioning triad

The concept of a speaking *position* refers to the set of rights, duties and obligations with respect to the kind of (speech) acts that an actor occupying a position can, or is expected to, legitimately and properly execute. Positioning theory provides a theoretical framework that highlights what people are *doing* when they talk about integration and related concepts. It illuminates the functions that integration discourses serve. The *positioning triad* is an analytical

tool that highlights the relationships between the building blocks of meaning, which are constituted by (1) actors given positions, (2) the actors' acts, which have social forces, and (3) the discursive contexts in which the actors are acting, which are storylines:

1. Positioned actors → Positions
2. Acts → Social forces (e.g. illocutionary, perlocutionary forces), and
3. Discursive contexts → Storylines

While Positioning theory was initially conceived to analyse social relations between persons, it can be applied to international relations and integration studies as well. First, states and regions can be attributed "actorness" in much the same way that persons are. This is reflected in utterances such as, "the U.S. have reacted angrily to...", "Europe is behaving ...", "Russia warned..." or "Israel invaded...". Insofar as they are attributed actorness, states and regions can be said to occupy *positions* in the international relations system. Second, international relations are always constituted by and of conversations between persons. This can be discussions between the Heads of the Member States of the EU, the President of the United States addressing the President of Mexico, a spokesperson for the U.K. addressing a journalist on the issue of enlargement of the EU, as well as a citizen expressing her beliefs about European Union foreign policy (or lack thereof) in a conversation with a neighbor. The present section elaborates upon the three components of the positioning triad and applies them to integration studies, illustrating with instances from integration speak.

Positioned actors and actorness

Two main sources of positioned actors can be identified. First, actors can be positioned by being directly referred to or implied in the text of a speech act. These are accomplished through the use of indexers, such as (personal) pronouns. Examples of direct references are “I,” “me,” “you,” “my friend, Cris,” “Belgium,” “Zambia,” “Africa,” and so forth. When referring directly to “Belgium” in the context of a meeting of the member states of the European Union (E.U.), an *implied* reference would be the other member states, such as “Germany,” “France,” and so forth. However, in the context of a meeting of the main regions of Europe, a direct reference to “Flanders” would have concomitant indirect references to the other regions, Wallonia and Brussels. Thus, the statement, “Flanders is a wealthy region,” can accomplish several positionings, including (but not excluded to) the following:

1. It (directly) positions the region “Flanders” as an actor;
2. It can (indirectly) position the region “Wallonia” as an actor;
3. It (directly) positions “Flanders” as wealthy;
4. It can (indirectly) position “Wallonia” as poor (or at least not wealthy).

The second main source of positioned actors is the social force of an act, which can position the author and his (given or implied) interlocutors. For example, in issuing a warning (social force of a speech act), Le Pen positions himself as a protector of “the French,” the “E.U.” and “Germany” as threatening enemies, and “the French”, his interlocutors, as vulnerable. In both the first and second cases, the positioned “actors” can be animate (“my friend, Cris”), or inanimate (“the E.U.”). Thus, states (Belgium), micro-regions (Flanders),

macro-regions (Europe), and multifarious institutions (the Commission) and other groups (the anti-globalists) can be positioned as actors.

In this manner, regions can be positioned as actors in the international system. This means that they can be positioned as constituting a complex stratified system of intentional acts, such as making treaties, joining international organisations, condemning the behaviour of states, and so forth. While on the one hand every area on Earth can be a “region,” given suitable historical, economic, cultural and social conditions, regions will only exist as the result of certain acts (cf. The Maastricht Treaty). But such acts only make sense in a dialogical social context, which means that there need to be other relevant actors who take up a certain storyline and thereby position the other actor in a certain way. Consider the following analogy: human beings do not become persons because they have a birth certificate and a given name but because other persons treat them as if they were persons too (Vygotsky, 1978). It is this process of *personification*, a process of reciprocal achievements, that enables a baby to learn the skills necessary to accomplish acts in a given society. In much the same way, a region can be regarded as the result of a process of reciprocal achievements that can be labeled “*regionification*.”

This means that to treat a certain geographic area in this way, that is, as constitutive of being a region, concomitantly ascribes that status to the region. In other words: regions are the products of processes of ‘regionification’; regions exist only if they are recognised as such by persons (who are sometimes positioned as representing other entities, such as organisations,

states or other regions). It is in this way that regions can be positioned as having “*actorness*” *properties*. They are thus positioned as entities in the system of IR that (i) have a certain degree of autonomy and that (ii) have powers to engage in some sort of purposive action. Bretherton and Vogler (1999) identify the following as properties of actorness:

- A shared commitment to a set of overarching values and principles;
- The ability to identify policy priorities and to formulate coherent policies;
- The ability to negotiate effectively with other actors in the international system;
- The availability of, and capacity to utilise, policy instruments; and
- A domestic legitimacy of decision processes and priorities, relating to external policy.

Because positioning theory allows us to analyse how “actorness” is engendered, we can modify the above to be more precise and avoid reification. In our view, it should be said that regions that are *positioned* as actors (or as having “actorness”) are *sometimes*:

- *positioned as* having a shared commitment to a set of overarching values and principles;
- *positioned as* having the ability to identify policy priorities and to formulate coherent policies;
- *positioned as* having the ability to negotiate effectively with other actors in the international system;
- *positioned as* having the availability of, and capacity to utilise, policy instruments; and
- *positioned as* having a domestic legitimacy of decision processes and priorities relating to external policy.

It should be noted that, while these qualities are sometimes attributed to regions, regions can also be positioned as *not* possessing these qualities. For example, the E.U. has been positioned as having domestic legitimacy, but it has also been positioned as lacking cohesion and legitimacy. In fact, the latter positioning-act functions to undermine the positioning of the E.U. as an actor.

According to public international law, only states qualify as actors, because only states can make treaties, join international organizations etc. (This is called possessing a “legal personality.”) On the other hand, international organizations such as the United Nations and the E.U. have a recognized legal status as well. The classic Realist approach in international relations is more or less the same: states are actors, and although other entities, such as regional organizations, may have some actorness properties, their role is subordinate to those of states. In our view, like states, macro-regions (E.U.) and micro-regions (Flanders) can be and are positioned as rational systems (with “statehood properties”).

Two main implications for “actorness” follow from these insights. First, the “actorness” varies according to the perspective of the assessor: Actorness depends upon the power (that is, the rights) of the actor to act at various levels, in various realms (issues), toward various ends (goals). These are the actor’s positions. Important to note is that the assessor’s assessment of the actorness of another actor will depend upon the assessor’s own goals. The assessor will determine the extent to which the powers (the rights and duties) of the other actors are

perceived as (ir)relevant to achieving these goals. For example, if I am interested in lobbying the U.N. to forbid an American attack on Iraq, I will consider “Russia,” “China,” and “France” as appropriate actors to address for this goal; in other words, I will grant them considerable “actorness”. In contrast, in this context I will not attribute much actorness to “Wallonia,” because it does not have the right to act toward this end.

A second implication is that a geographical region such as Europe can appear as several actors: in such a case, ‘Europe’ is not the same actor during the course of every act. Nor is there a set of necessary and sufficient criteria to identify which acts constitute “Europe”. It can be said that acts assessed as being executed by the actor “Europe” are seen or positioned as sharing a set of ‘family resemblances’ (Wittgenstein, 1953). A given act must be attributed to an actor (e.g. ‘Cris’, ‘Flanders’, ‘Belgium’, ‘Europe’, ‘the U.N.’ and so forth). This attribution will depend (at least in part) to the attributed motivations of the actor in doing the act. Such attributed motivations take the form of a storyline, such as: “Tony Blair gave money to Africa, because he wants to improve his image,” or “the U.K. donated money to Africa, because it is trying to make up for its suppression of Africans during the colonial period.” Within the context of such a storyline, both the actor (Tony; the U.K.) and the act itself (“buying an image”; “remuneration”) are defined.

In summary, regions – like states – are not a given part of reality, but are the result of a process of social construction. For a given geographical area to be (positioned as) as region, at least three necessary conditions need to be fulfilled:

- i) A geographical area must be positioned by other actors as a region (regionification process) [That is, a “region” exists];
- ii) People must position this “region” as an actor [That is, the “region” is an actor]; and
- iii) People must be positioned as acting and generating meaning on behalf of a region. [That is, the “region” acts.]

These three conditions form the basis of *regionhood*, which distinguishes regions from non-regions.

Acts or Social Forces

Acts are the *meaning-full* counterparts of actions. The act is what is accomplished socially through a particular action, which can be constituted by linguistic and/or non-linguistic discourse. For example, the shaking of hands (non-linguistic action) can have the meaning that a bet is sealed (act), or it can be a greeting (act). A greeting can also be accomplished by a different action: a man can tip his hat (action) to greet a colleague. An example more relevant to regional integration is the action of allowing an Arab to hold a seat in the Knesset, which was interpreted by some people as an act of compromise to promote democracy and peace, and by others as an act of treason.

As a linguistic example, in the above passage from Le Pen, one of the speech acts accomplished is a *warning*. In the same interview, Le Pen accomplishes an *accusation* in

saying, “It’s not me who has become extreme Right. It’s the whole of society which has become extreme Left.” With the same utterance, Le Pen is also *defending* himself (act) against an (implicit) accusation, which exemplifies how an utterance (a linguistic action) can have multiple social forces; that is, it can accomplish multiple acts. Here, it is important to note that Le Pen is not simply describing reality or “stating the facts.” Rather, he is *doing* something socially. Language is a discursive tool that has a social force. As noted by Diez (1999, p.600), “language is performative in that it does not only take note of, say, the founding of the E.C. Instead, it is *through* language that this founding is performed.”

Storylines

Essential to how an action is interpreted as an act is the context. The contexts of acts and positions are storylines. Storylines are temporal and (hence) a teleological series of customary events, or “plots,” that are familiar to a society. In other words, storylines implicitly or explicitly link the past with the present and future. In integration speak a clear example is the E.U. storyline of “an ever-closer union”, in which individual isolated (nation-) states are interpreted as coming together in some kind of “union”. These teleological elements in integration speak are embedded in complex cultural and historical accounts of history. An important aspect of this teleological character is that it offers an arena to make progress possible, an aspect upon which we will elaborate later.

As the concept of “integration” implies a process, any instance of it will entail the interpretation of a string of actions as a set of acts with an identified pattern or trend. Varied

interpretations of acts in regional integration processes are numerous. Let us take, for example, the proposed action of Denmark joining Europe's Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). In the debates on this issue that preceded the referendum in the year 2000, various Danes interpreted this proposed action as an act in quite different storylines (Slocum, 2001). Pia Kjaersgaard, leader of the Danish People's Party, interpreted the proposed action as an act in the storyline that "the EU is invading and eroding Danish identity," as exemplified in the following passage:

The essential issue is the preservation of our sovereignty. The euro will erode our national authority and identity at a time when Denmark is already becoming more and more multiethnic and globalized. Do we want to lose control of our lives with more and more decisions made by the European Central Bank in Frankfurt or in Brussels? Do we want this multiculturalism, this multiethnicity, about which the country was never consulted? I say we don't want either.⁵

In another storyline, Danes interpreted the EU and EMU as increasing the power of Denmark, saving it from obscurity and economic ruin. This storyline is evident in Maja Lillelund's answer to how she would vote in the referendum and why:

I will vote yes. I haven't followed the debate that closely, but I simply can't see Denmark outside the European community. Having become a part of the community we need to move forward with it, to stay part of the mainstream. We are not like

Norway. They have their oil and can manage on their own. We
in Denmark are not strong enough to be outside.⁶

Both of these storylines entail certain presumptions about how events will (or would, given the outcome of the referendum) unfold in the future, as well as evaluations of such a turn of events. The teleological elements of the former “invasion” storyline are that Danes would lose control of their lives, given EMU membership, but will maintain such control by voting ‘no.’ In the latter “increased power” storyline, it is predicted that, without EMU membership, Denmark will fall behind and deteriorate to further weakness, but Denmark would gain strength by being a member of the EMU. These teleological elements of the storylines provide the rationales for the speakers’ conclusions regarding what actions should be undertaken – in this case, voting ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in the referendum (Slocum, 2001).

In positioning a region as a rational system, storylines are used to make sense out of sequences of actions. These storylines, when efficaciously applied to specific cases, give meaning to certain actions (that is, they define them as acts) and tie them together in a manner that gives them a particular sense or “rational” appearance. Such a storyline often entails an explanation as to why various goals and means for their realization are selected. For example, China claims (uses the storyline) to suppress the Falun Gong movement in order to protect (*act*) the Chinese society. These storylines, or explanations, frequently employ the use of discursive

⁵ *The New York Times*. 10 September 2000. A Danish Identity Crisis: Are We Europeans? By Roger Cohen.

⁶ CNN.com In-Depth Specials. Denmark Decides. Vox pop. <http://europe.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2000/denmark>

concepts such as “having certain beliefs.” An example of this is the storyline often heard in the U.S. that China abuses (*act*) human rights because they believe that a community is more important than the individual. These examples also illustrate how the same actions can be defined as different acts (“protecting” versus “abusing”) within the contexts of different storylines.

A variety of storylines are particularly common in contemporary integration speak.

These include the following:

1. Integration will bring increased economic prosperity to the region.
2. Integration will ensure peace (e.g. prevent violent war) in a region.
3. Integration will increase the power of a region and hence allow it to balance U.S. (cultural, political, social, economic, military, etc.) hegemony.
4. Integration will enable a region to become a global actor (to better compete with other powerful countries and regions).
5. Integration will provide a new common identity for a region.
6. Increased regionalism will provide more democracy (the principle of subsidiarity).
7. States that do not integrate will maintain greater sovereignty; those that do will lose their sovereignty.
8. States that do not integrate will preserve their identity; those that do will lose it.
9. Globalism and increased integration are harming the environment.
10. Those promoting globalism and increased integration are taking advantage of the poor; these are the manipulative tools of capitalists.

11. Globalism and integration serve only the elite; the average person suffers under them.

Triadic interaction

In positioning theory, positioned actors, acts, and storylines are portrayed as part of a triad in order to emphasize their mutually influential relationship. As stated earlier, storylines are constituted by patterns of acts that are recognized as such by the members of a culture. Simultaneously, the storylines provide the context within which an action is interpreted as an act, or given meaning. For example, within the context of the “E.U. invasion” storyline, the action of voting ‘yes’ in the Danish euro referendum was interpreted as an act of treason. In contrast, the same action in the context of the “increased power” storyline, was interpreted as an act of saving Denmark.

It is through acts (which have a social force), within the contexts of storylines, that the actors are positioned. At the same time, the positions of the actors influence how an action is interpreted as an act. Take for example, Pierre, a Frenchman, who is sitting in a Parisian café and sharing a French baguette with some friends. Pierre says, “These baguettes are really the best!” In this context, Pierre’s locution (action) is likely to be interpreted as a compliment (act) to the baker. Pierre is here positioned as an individual in the storyline “relaxing with friends.” Now, let us imagine Pierre on vacation in California. Pierre is sitting with some American friends in a café, orders a French baguette, and makes the same remark. Here, (as correct as he may

be about the bread) Pierre's comment may be interpreted as snobbery or condescension, as he is more likely to be positioned as "the Frenchman" in the storyline of "displaying national pride."

It is also the case that not everyone possesses the same rights and duties – or abilities to assume various positions – and hence, not everyone is equally able to perform the same acts. Thus, while Pierre can make a claim about the superiority of French baguettes, he will not be permitted to act on behalf of France in signing a treaty with José Maria Aznar. In contrast, Jaques Chirac can act as "France," or as an individual (Jaques), or even as "Europe" if he is negotiating with the Japanese (or, more precisely, someone positioned as acting on behalf of "the Japanese"). The position attributed to an actor in a given episode will also influence the act he is seen to be performing.

Discursive tools

Engendering social forces, positioning actors, and building storylines are accomplished through the employment of discursive tools, such as concepts, metaphors, simile, tropes, and so forth. The compilation of the discursive tools available for addressing a given issue is a topical lexicon. As such, integration speak, the talking and writing about regional integration processes, involves the use of a particular lexicon (Slocum and van Langenhove, in press).

In "integration speak," one common discursive tool is the concept of "identity." This discursive resource is generally found within the storyline that people "have" (a metaphor that portrays possession of a static object) a certain "identity" that is tied to a specific space (e.g. a

national identity), and that this identity “causes” them to act in various ways. Positioning theory is a useful tool to examine how various “identity” concepts serve various social functions in specific contexts. For example, in the Danish euro referendum that we referred to earlier, identity concepts were often employed to argue for or against Denmark becoming a member of the EMU.

While many Danes expressed fear of a loss of identity in joining the E.U., it is important to remember that “identity” is not literally an object that one can lose (and perhaps find again). Identity is a dynamic concept, the meaning of which is constructed in discourses. The meaning of “identity” (and other concepts) is derived from how it is used in the discourse, the functions that it serves, the acts it is used to accomplish, the illocutionary force it bears when used in a specific episode. In general, different identity concepts are used to position actors in various ways.

In relation to regions, the identity concept is employed in two main ways. First, when positioned as an actor, a region can be positioned by being attributed a particular identity; in fact, the attribution of an identity to a region is one way to position it as an actor. As with persons, when a region is positioned in a specific context (storyline), it is attributed a set of rights, duties and characteristics that determine how and with which other actors (e.g. regions) “it” may or may not act. However, as regions themselves are inanimate, acts attributed to them are always executed by persons who are positioned as acting on behalf of a region. People are often (implicitly) presumed to be acting on behalf of an institution. Perhaps because (nation-)

states are the strongest institutions of the post-Westphalia system, people are often positioned as acting on behalf of their state. It is interesting to note that the new emphasis on *regions*, in addition to states, creates new actors that are capable of new kinds of acts.

The second main way in which the “identity” concept is used in relation to regions is by positioning individuals within the context of a storyline that links the individual to a certain region. For example, the storyline is often (implicitly) presumed that a “national identity” *causes* or motivates people to act in a particular way. Again, the new storyline that people can be “motivated” by “identities” other than those linked to (nation-) states, such as a regional identity, opens up new possibilities for action. Thus, new possibilities for types of actors (ways of being) and ways of acting emerge within new storylines.

The concept of a region as an actor is a discursive tool that is relatively new to contemporary discourse. By virtue of the fact that a new region is a new actor, at a unique position in a web of inter-relationships, greater possibilities become available for meaning – that is, for acting and being. The fact that (by definition) a new region (or any other actor) has no or little history, the meanings given to it and its actions are more flexible than the often entrenched patterns of (usually unreflected) attributions associated with older actors. Through proactive positioning of a region and the actions attributed to it (as acts), people can generate and communicate such new meanings. Here it becomes clearer why new institutions generate new possibilities for action (acts)! For example, within the European Commission, a German’s actions (such as a proposal for a certain foreign policy) are more likely to be interpreted as

improving or helping Europe (act) than as fighting for German interests (and, tacitly, as being in competition with other European states' interests). It is often the unspoken but implicit contexts – or storylines – that make evident the differences in these acts. The action of “helping Europe” is often embedded in a storyline that the EU is in competition with other large powers, particularly the U.S. and Japan. The act of serving German interests, in contrast, is embedded in a storyline that the European countries are competing with each other.

The contents of topical lexicons, such as integration speak, are likely to vary amongst different communities. For example, integration speak is found among communities such as:

- The community of ‘officials’ involved in formalised integration initiatives (cf. civil servant of the European Commission and their colleagues in national administrations dealing with European affairs)
- The scientific communities of international law, international relations, geography, etc.
- The political community
- The media

There are complex relations between these different communities that can be studied from a Positioning Theory perspective. Of particular interest is the relationship between academic and non-academic integration-speak. Integration speak (or talk about integration) includes, but is not limited to, “first-order positioning” (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1992). Integration theory, on the other hand, is talk about integration speak – or talk about talk about integration. If one takes this a step higher, you have talk about talk of integration speak – or talk

about the theories of integration speak. Scientific work that is done from a social constructionist perspective can be second- or third-order positioning. However, it is important to note that in second- and third-order positioning, first-order positioning always occurs as well. The variations in the lexicons are likely to have important implications for practice that are well worth studying.

Lexicons, or sets of discursive tools, can be studied and evaluated from two perspectives: (i) the adequacy of the lexical resources for some discursive tasks and (ii) the role of the lexicon in focusing attention on otherwise 'invisible' aspects of material reality. The *lexical adequacy* of integration-speak refers to the question of whether the lexical resources of language X are suited to the discussion of the phenomena referred to as regional integration. Harré et al (1999) distinguish three types of adequacy:

- i) *Referential* adequacy is the availability of lexical resources to discuss a given topic in sufficient detail (sufficiency being relative to the task in hand);
- ii) *Systematic* adequacy refers to the quality of being structured so as to approach maximum rule economy and efficiency;
- iii) *Social* adequacy is the extent to which a language is acceptable to a maximum number of speakers in a target community, promotes social unity and intercommunication, and caters to present as well as anticipated future social needs.

Integration-speak will be “adequate” if the language used is referentially, systematically and socially adequate.

The adequacy of a lexicon and the specific storylines and positions generated in a situation, have significant implications for what is considered desirable or even possible to do. The lexical resources of integration speak that are employed in a given instance influence not only whether cooperation or integration is considered to be desirable or undesirable, and “formal” or “informal”, but also whether it is considered possible. For example, in April 2002, a conference took place between members of the Southern Caucasus states (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) to discuss possibilities for informal cooperation between them that would not set political resolution of problems as a requisite. Some of the Azerbaijanis claimed that cooperation between their country and Armenia would be impossible. Due to Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory, they considered themselves to be “at war” with Armenia (storyline) and saw this fact as incompatible with efforts to cooperate in any fashion. In these statements, the potential cooperators are positioned as representatives of their respective countries. Simultaneously, and in contrast, at the so-called “Red Bridge,” a marketplace located at the confluence of the borders of the three countries, members of each of these states trade readily on an “informal” basis. Thus, what was claimed to be “impossible” when people were positioned as “Azerbaijanis” and “Armenians” actually takes place at the Red Bridge. It would be a useful research endeavor to examine the positioning that occurs in this context and other

instances of “informal” cooperation, as well as the storylines that make such cooperation possible.

Creating new possibilities for conceptualization and action

The topic of social adequacy of a lexicon highlights the importance of language for conceptualization, communication, and action. As exemplified in the quotations provided from the discourse surrounding the Danish euro referendum, the same action can be conceptualized (that is, defined as acts embedded in storylines) in different ways. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the storyline suggests how the future will develop, and thus also suggests what appear to be “rational” options for action and which options appear to be “irrational.” For example, if joining the E.U. is conceived as “treason,” one should best decline membership.

While clear patterns can be discerned in narratives, discourse and action, it is important that these not be reified or seen as deterministic. Storylines do not make people act in a given way; rather, people use discursive tools to create meaningful experiences. People are the makers and users of these tools; in this way, they are the craft masters of their reality. We earlier touched upon the idea that the creation of new types of actors and storylines also engenders new possibilities for experience and action. It is to the realm of creativity and its implications for action that we turn now.

Positioning theory emphasizes the active nature of people in engendering their social realities. By highlighting the social/illocutionary forces of acts, positioning theory helps one to

focus on the functions served by one's actions. Thus, one can query whether one's actions are accomplishing the social tasks that one desires. From this point of view, social events appear less mechanical; one can more consciously choose one's goals and then pose the question as to how these can best be reached. Future studies could usefully focus on how new storylines, positions, and acts can be engendered in the context of practical situations in a way that bridges the present into a desired future. Concomitant to these theoretical insights is a need for research methods that are consistent with them.

Prospective and participative methodology: Foresight

An increasingly popular venue for this kind of future-oriented inquiry is that of "foresight studies". Foresight is a method for the systematic gathering of future-oriented intelligence toward the aim of medium- to long-term vision-building (Miles & Keenan, 2002; Van Langenhove, 2002). Foresight can be used to inform policy, build networks and enhance capacity for handling long-term issues. It is a so-called "participatory" research method in that researchers do not impose (implicitly or otherwise) goals upon society. Rather, various stakeholders of the issue(s) being considered participate in exploring potential developments and the relationships between various possible means and outcomes. Positioning theory, and the social constructionist view more generally, are particularly useful in such exercises, because they illuminate and facilitate the questioning of both means and ends in society.

Foresight exercises are a possible method for applying the insights provided by positioning theory to issues relevant to regional integration. One example of such an exercise is

to investigate the possibilities for new forms of governance and how to overcome challenges such as identity conceptions. For example, in the European context, supranational governance was proposed as a solution to the war-torn continent. However, contemporary conceptions of “identity” have presented a barrier to supranational governance. In foresight exercises, participants can address the question, “How can we construct our identities in a way that facilitates peace?” Such discussions also lead to the questioning of whether or not (only) a supranational form of governance is the best means to a peaceful society. In turn, additional alternatives might be (and have been) suggested, such as micro-regional governance. And again in turn, the types of identities that would facilitate this solution can be explored. With this approach, complex social issues can be tackled in a manner that does not oversimplify them and promotes creative practical solutions.

This participatory approach also facilitates democracy through the creation of discursive space where citizens can develop storylines and take positions regarding many local and global problems that face humanity. Heretofore the mainstream idea has been that global problems cannot be discussed or negotiated by the billions of people that inhabit the Earth, so governments or regions must do so on their behalf. As a result, citizens are hardly involved in the system of international relations. For example, the anti-globalisation movement shows that there is a civic movement emerging that combines grass-root movements with high-tech tools (such as the Internet) in order to challenge the international policy-making. The question is not whether the anti-globalists are wrong or right. Rather, the point is to acknowledge that the protestors

have no room to voice their concerns other than the streets and the Internet. In accordance with the presently endorsed approach, it should be clear that European governance, or governance of any region, does not need to be “translated” but constructed through a democratic process in which all storylines are permitted to be expressed. Through Foresight and other participatory and prospective methods, the functions served by various storylines can be illuminated, in order to inform decisions. Whether one thinks we need more or less integration (for example, in Europe, where this issue is a hot potato), the debates will profit from more integration speak!

Evaluating discursive research: Validity and reliability criteria

All researchers are required to defend the standards of their work, and discursive researchers are no exception. To the contrary, the discursive researcher is often challenged with much more suspicion, due to his or her divergence from mainstream presumptions regarding the nature of science. As a new scientific paradigm requires a new methodology, so it also requires new evaluation criteria. In this section we briefly discuss validity and reliability criteria, contrasting old conceptions with techniques appropriate to the presently advocated approach.

Validity

How do we confirm or disconfirm positioning analyses? Unlike the case of hypothesis testing in the physical sciences, in social science there is often no independent reality against which to check the appropriateness and fruitfulness of positioning hypotheses, point by point. The test for a positioning analysis is the degree of intelligibility it offers the analyst for understanding the development of the episode in question. “Positions” are the implicit

psychological reality that the analysis reveals. One useful analogy would be with analytical chemistry, in that analysis of a substance results in a chemical formula that enables the chemist to understand the subsequent pattern of how that substance reacts. The formula makes explicit that which is implicit. Furthermore, positioning theory functions in a way very similar to the way that Darwinian evolutionary theory functions in biology. There is no way that a biologist could ever predict the future course of organic evolution. The Darwinian theory allows a biologist to understand what has already happened, and to make sense of whatever further developments occur in an evolutionary line.

The methodological principles of analysis are different from, but run parallel to, those of causal subsumption (Cummins, 1983). According to Cummins, the methodological requirements for analysis are:

1. Instantiation laws must be derivable from nomic⁷ attributions that specify the properties of the components of a system.
2. The analyzed property should not reappear in the analysis.
3. The analyzing properties should be confirmable independently of the property being analyzed.

⁷ Nomic: (adj.) customary; conventional. From *The Hutchinson Dictionary of Difficult Words*.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) propose four main analytic techniques that can be used to validate the findings of discursive analysis: (a) coherence, (b) participants' orientation, (c) new problems, and (d) fruitfulness. Each of these techniques will be elaborated briefly.

(a) Coherence

Analysis should let us see how the discourse fits together and how the discursive structure serves functions. Ideally, the explanation should cover both the broad pattern and account for many of the micro-sequences. Apparent exceptions to the analytic scheme should be marked by special features that plausibly explain the difference. This criterion, in narratology, has been referred to as "verisimilitude" (Bruner, 1990), "apparency" (Van Mannen, 1988), "authenticity," "plausibility," and "adequacy," among others (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

(b) Participants' orientation

In accordance with the principles of ethnomethodology, we are interested in participants' interpretations, not analysts'. Since people reply to each other's discourse, this can be checked by examining how people treat other people's utterances. For example, if the utterance "Do you have a Snickers?" is replied to with the production of the candy, then the utterance was interpreted as a request; the analyst should not appeal to its question form. Similarly, the American greeting, "What's up" does not lead to an interlocutor's contemplation of the sky, so it should not be interpreted as a query either.

(c) New problems

One of the primary goals of discourse analysis is to clarify the discursive resources people use to make certain things happen, to make sense of what has happened, and to prepare meanings in advance for what they intend will happen. In addition to solving problems, the employment of these resources also creates new problems. The existence of new problems, and their solutions, provides further confirmation that the discursive resources are being used as hypothesized.

(d) Fruitfulness

Fruitfulness refers to the scope of an analytic scheme to make sense of new kinds of discourse and to generate novel explanations.

Reliability

In traditional social science literature, qualitative data are coded into categories, and reliability is assessed by showing that these categories are reliable through scores of inter-rater reliability. However, this assessment tells us only that raters are using the same interpretive procedure; it says nothing about the basis of their agreement (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Since discursive psychologists take language itself to be the topic of interest, making documentary analyses reliable entails highlighting in detail the ways in which texts are interpreted. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987), the documentary analyses and conclusions should be presented in such a way that the reader is able to assess the researchers' interpretations. These authors

emphasize that, for discourse analysis, the final report itself constitutes part of the confirmation and validation procedures.

Broader Implications of a Discursive Approach

The presently advocated discursive approach serves another important function that bears broad implications for how social science is taught and practiced, and how it can contribute to policy decisions. This function is that the approach serves to draw people's attention to how they actively co-construct their social realities. This activity-orientation encourages the acceptance of responsibility for the kind of realities we construct. In this light, it may be most prudent first to ask ourselves what kind of social reality we would like to achieve, and then to query how such a reality might best be achieved. This may seem counterintuitive, because the dominant Western ideology suggests that facts are independent of persons and that a process of pure logic will unambiguously lead to rational conclusions. If these conclusions are incompatible with our ideals, then we assume that reality and our ideals are irreconcilable. However, contrary to these notions, facts do not speak for themselves, nor do conclusions flow automatically from facts. This rational process is imbued with many layers of human interpretation regarding the nature of 'the facts' and the rational conclusions that can be drawn from them. These insights raise the possibility of starting with the "conclusions," or ends, and then constructing "the facts" that make these ends most viable. In order to accomplish this, we will first need to understand, A1) how we construct our social and psychological "realities" in discourse and A2) how our constructions serve various goals and functions. Once we have understood these processes, we can B1) actively choose the goals and functions we would like

to achieve and then B2) construct “realities” that facilitate them. Positioning theory illuminates goals A1 and A2, while Foresight methods facilitate B1 and B2.

Public Policy Relevance

One implication that follows from this activity-orienting function of the discursive approach is that it can be useful in informing public policy decisions. In presuming to be merely “descriptive” (of “the facts”), a great deal of social research has proven unhelpful to policy-makers who want to achieve certain goals. In addition, due to this descriptive presumption, researchers can even contribute to the perpetuation of phenomena that their research aims to prevent. For example, certain methods employed in attempts at conflict resolution and the prevention of prejudice and discrimination may actually play a part in their maintenance. Addressing the example of the nation-state concept, Beck (1998: 50-51) describes the character of the relationship between policy and social science that has existed heretofore, a relationship which has perpetuated and entrenched classical ways of thinking rather than facilitating change.

The organizational scheme [of the nation-state] is not only externally valid, but also internally. The internal space, as distinguishable from external individual communities, is subdivided into inner totalities. On the one hand, these are thought about and analyzed as *collective identities* (classes, estates, religious and ethnic groups, distinct ways of life for men and women). On the other hand, they are theoretically conceived and differentiated according to the organism-metaphor of

social systems, separated and ordered into the individual worlds of economics, politics, law, science, family and so forth, with their “logics” (“codes”). The internal homogeneity is essentially a creation of state control. All sorts of social practices – production, culture, language, job market, capital, education – are normed, influenced, limited, rationalized, and at the very least, labeled according to a nation-state scheme. The state pre-determines a territorial unit as a “container”, in which statistics on economic and social processes and situations are systematically collected. In this manner, the categories of the state’s self-observation become categories of the empirical social sciences, such that the social sciences confirm the bureaucratic definitions of reality. (My translation; emphasis in original).

Rather than presume the “nation-state” and other categories to be stable entities, the present approach examines how categories are constituted and given meaning through purposeful use in discourse. By attaining an understanding of how discursive constructions accomplish various goals, social scientists can provide policy-makers with information about the discursive means employed to accomplish goals of interest.

Educational and Research Practices

A second implication regards educational and research practices. The discursive approach acknowledges that, both in doing research and in giving accounts about their research, social scientists are contributing to the construction of a social reality. Therefore, in teaching both theory and research methods, the discursive approach naturally focuses attention to

researchers' roles and responsibilities in reality-construction. It also encourages exploration of creative alternatives in reality-construction. Rather than lecture to students or report to policy committees on how the world *is*, discursive social scientists might discuss how people—including ourselves—*are constructing* the world, and how we might construct it in order to realize the goals that we desire.

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Table 1: Examples of physical and metaphysical components of reality.

Vocabulary	Physical component	Metaphysical component	Vocabulary
Object	UN Flag Twin Towers	World peace Financial power; Western hegemony	Symbol
Action (Speech) action	Shaking hands “Dinner is served”	Greeting; Bet Invitation; Request	Act (Speech) act

Table 2: Two Ontologies (Adapted from Harré & Gillett, 1994: 29)

<i>Ontologies</i>	<i>Locative Systems</i>	<i>Entities</i>	<i>Relations</i>
Newtonian	Space and time	Objects and events	Causality
Discursive	Arrays of Positions	Speech acts	Storylines