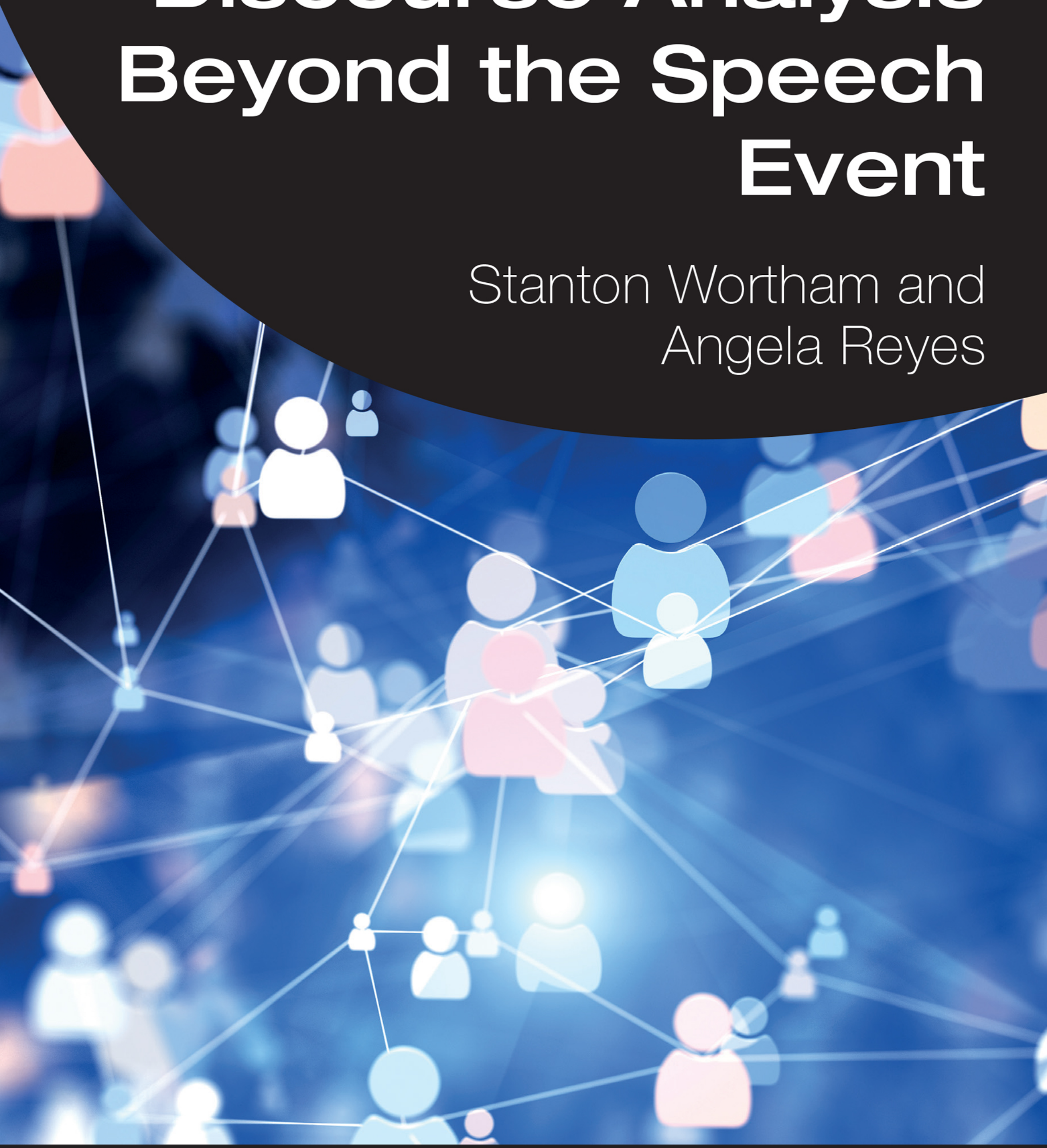
Second Edition

Discourse Analysis Beyond the Speech Event

Stanton Wortham and
Angela Reyes



DISCOURSE ANALYSIS BEYOND THE SPEECH EVENT

In its first edition, winner of the 2016 Edward Sapir Book Prize from the Society for Linguistic Anthropology of the American Anthropological Association

Discourse Analysis Beyond the Speech Event introduces a new approach to discourse analysis. In this innovative work, Wortham and Reyes argue that discourse analysts should look beyond fixed speech events and consider the development of discourses over time. Drawing on theories and methods from linguistic anthropology and related fields, this book is the first to present a systematic methodological approach to conducting discourse analysis of linked events, allowing researchers to understand not only individual events but also the patterns that emerge across them.

This new edition:

- Draws on theories and methods from linguistic anthropology and related fields;
- Presents the first systematic methodological approach to doing discourse analysis of linked events;
- Provides easy-to-use tools and techniques for analyzing discourse both within and across events;
- Offers transparent procedures and clear illustrations to show how the approach can be applied to analyze three types of data: ethnographic, archival, and new media;
- Includes a new chapter focusing on the discourse analysis of contemporary nationalist new media data.

Updated and revised for the second edition, this book is essential reading for advanced students and researchers working in the area of discourse analysis.

Stanton Wortham is Charles F. Donovan, S.J., Dean of the Boston College Lynch School of Education and Human Development. He has written on classroom discourse and the linguistic anthropology of education, interactional positioning in media discourse and autobiographical narrative, and Mexican immigrant communities in the U.S.

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Stanton Wortham and Angela Reyes

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For Ben, Rachel, Dalis, and Jay—*S.W.*

For Anna—*A.R.*

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Stanton Wortham
Boston, June 2020
Angela Reyes
New York City, June 2020

1

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ACROSS EVENTS

Discourse analysis is a research method that provides systematic evidence about social processes through the detailed examination of speech, writing, and other signs. This book describes an approach to discourse analysis drawn primarily from the field of linguistic anthropology (Agha, 2007; Duranti, 1997; Silverstein, 1976, 2003)—a discipline that studies language use in social and cultural contexts—although we also borrow concepts from related fields. Our approach makes two significant contributions. First, we clearly delineate a linguistic anthropological method for doing discourse analysis, offering transparent procedures and illustrations. Second, we extend discourse analysis beyond the speech event, showing how to study the pathways that linguistic forms, utterances, cultural models, individuals, and groups travel across events.

Recent theoretical and empirical work has made it clear that many important social processes can only be understood if we move beyond single speech events to analyze pathways across linked events (Agha, 2007; Agha & Wortham, 2005; Wortham, 2012). Learning, for example, involves systematic changes in behavior from one event to the next. A learner has experiences in one or more events and then behaves differently in subsequent events. In socialization, to take another example, a novice experiences events characteristic of a group and then participates more competently in subsequent events. No matter how sophisticated our analyses of discrete events, we cannot offer empirically adequate analyses of processes like learning and socialization unless we study pathways across linked events, because such processes are inherently cross-event. In order for discourse analysis to be a useful method for studying processes like learning and socialization, it must uncover how people, signs, knowledge, dispositions, and tools travel from one event to another and facilitate behavior in subsequent events. This book presents the first systematic methodological approach to doing discourse analysis of linked events.

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An example

Consider the following example, taken from a ninth-grade combined English and history classroom in an urban American school. The two teachers are discussing Aristotle's *Politics* with 18 students—6 boys and 12 girls, mostly African American. See Wortham (2006) for more information on this classroom. The class is exploring Aristotle's account of human nature, specifically the question of what distinguishes humans from animals. In the passage they have read, Aristotle says: "he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be beast or god" (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, line 29). This implies that an individual who lives outside society is more like an animal than a human. Teachers and students discuss what criterion Aristotle would have used to distinguish humans from "beasts."

Right before segment 1, one teacher has tentatively proposed a criterion: humans have goals and animals do not. A student, Tyisha, objects. (Transcription conventions are in Appendices A and B; "TYI" is Tyisha; "T/B" is Mrs. Bailey, one of the two teachers running this classroom discussion.)

Segment 1: Tyisha's cat as a beast

525 TYI: Mrs. Bailey? I- I have to disagree
((class laughter))
T/B: can I- can I finish this before you disagree, okay. the idea that he's putting
out here is that they- they have goals, and that they can in discussion decide
the best way to accomplish their goal. now, Tyisha what's your
530 disagreement?
TYI: becau(hh)- because if a- like- if my- okay, if my cat want to- um you
know to get to the top of something, you know, he might sit there and be ((3
unintelligible syllables)) and he'll sit there and try every day. and then finally
he will do it, that was the goal to try and get up there. he had a goal.
535 T/B: okay (1.0) he's got a [goal but
ST: [was his goal really necessary? ((laughter from class))
T/B: let's- let's- let's take what- (3.0) let's take what your cat's doing that
every day he sees that- counter that he wants to get on, and every day when
he passes that counter he tries to get up there. that's a goal. okay[=
540 ST: [yeah.
T/B: =how is that different than your goal, the goal that you might have
had last night when you had this reading, or-
((some chattering))
TYI: °I don't know°

In the first line (525), Tyisha states explicitly what type of action she is performing: disagreement. Such an explicit statement can be useful, as it offers discourse analysts guidance in interpreting the event. Discourse analysis would be easy if analysts could rely on people's explicit descriptions of what they are doing. This cannot suffice as a methodological approach, however, for two reasons. First, speakers sometimes lie, speak ironically, or make mistakes. Maybe Tyisha is correct that this event is a disagreement, but perhaps not. Second, speakers do not typically provide explicit interpretations of their discourse. Most of the time, both participants and analysts must interpret implicit messages and infer what type of action is occurring.

Our approach to discourse analysis depends centrally on a distinction between what Jakobson (1957) called a *narrated event* and an "event of speaking" or *narrating event* (we place important technical terms in italics when introducing and defining them). The narrated event is what is being talked about, while the narrating event is the activity of talking about it. Narrated content includes more than just narratives. Jakobson uses "narrated event" to refer to any denoted content, and we use "narrating event" to refer to any discursive interaction among participants, whether or not the speakers tell stories. From lines 527–529, for example, the teacher describes Aristotle's theory. This narrated event has consistently been the topic of conversation for several minutes. From lines 525–527 and 529–530, the speech event itself is the narrated event, as the teacher and Tyisha mention her impending "disagreement." Even in cases where the speech event is not explicitly described, any discursive interaction always involves an event of speaking, the interaction between speaker and audience within which narrated events are described. In this passage, the narrating event involves teachers and students having a classroom conversation about Aristotle.

Teachers and students could be doing various other things in this narrating event as well. They could be teasing each other, excluding and mistreating some participants, flirting, taking political stands, or various other possible social actions. In our approach to discourse analysis, the central goal is to uncover systematic evidence of the types of social action that are occurring in the event of speaking. An initial step is mapping out the relationship between narrated and narrating events, because content communicated in the narrated events provides crucial resources for accomplishing action in the narrating event.

In the preceding passage, speakers create two additional narrated events in addition to Aristotle's theory and the "disagreement" in the classroom interaction itself. At line 531, Tyisha gives an example. There are now three narrated events: (1) the teacher's claims about Aristotle's theory of humans and animals; (2) Tyisha's explicit characterization of the next phase of their conversation as a "disagreement"; and (3) Tyisha's cat as an example of a "beast" which appears, contrary to the teacher's claim, to have goals. Then, at line 541, the teacher introduces Tyisha herself as a contrasting example, a human who—she will go on to argue—has different kinds of goals than a beast. We could treat this as a fourth narrated event, but we will instead treat it as the introduction of a second character (Tyisha) into the third narrating event, the example about Tyisha's cat.

Figure 1.1 represents the narrated and narrating events. We will use figures in this format throughout the book to present narrated and narrating events visually. The external rectangle represents the narrating event, the interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. We represent the main characters as ovals, and we separate teachers from students because of their different institutional statuses—differential roles that can be seen in the teachers' right to direct conversation and evaluate students, for example. At this point in the conversation, we represent Tyisha as part of the class, in the same group as the other students, because she is participating in the conversation as many of her peers do. The embedded box on the right represents the narrated event about Aristotle's theory of humans and beasts. Aristotle distinguishes between the two, and the class discusses what separates one from the other, exploring whether humans have goals and beasts do not, for example. The embedded box on the left represents the example of Tyisha and her cat. Tyisha offers this example in order to argue that animals have goals just like humans, and Mrs. Bailey elaborates it by discussing whether Tyisha herself has goals similar to her cat's. The example borrows the distinction between humans and beasts from Aristotle, and it presents Tyisha and her cat as exemplars of these two categories. We do not represent the third narrated event, the explicit characterization of their interaction as a disagreement, partly to save space and partly because this topic does not recur until later.

In order to identify the social action occurring in the narrating event, discourse analysts must analyze narrated events—because the characterization of narrated characters and events is one of the most important resources that speakers use to accomplish social acts in discursive interaction. In this example, the distinction between humans and beasts—established in their discussion of Aristotle—and the characterizations of Tyisha and her cat—established through the example—become crucial tools for teachers and students as they position Tyisha herself in the classroom conversation.

The first step in discourse analysis, then, involves mapping out the narrated and narrating events, as illustrated in Figure 1.1. Early in an analysis, we often do not know what types of social action are occurring in the narrating event, so we just make a provisional sketch of positioning in the narrating event and revise it later in the analysis. The next step is to figure out how signs that speakers use to describe the narrated event also communicate information about social action occurring in the narrating event. As described more extensively in Chapter 2, we recommend that discourse analysts first attend to certain types of signs that often carry information about the narrating event. *Deictics*, for example, inevitably link narrated and narrating events (Silverstein, 1976). We give a more precise definition of these forms in Chapter 2, but, for now, we can define them as linguistic signs whose referential value (what they communicate about the narrated event) depends on information about the (narrating) speech event itself. In line 532, for example, Tyisha refers to her cat as "he." Participants and analysts only know the referent of "he" because they heard her use the term "my cat" in prior discourse, at line 531. If we entered the conversation at line 532, the referent of "he" would not be clear. At line 541, the teacher uses "you" to refer to Tyisha. We only know

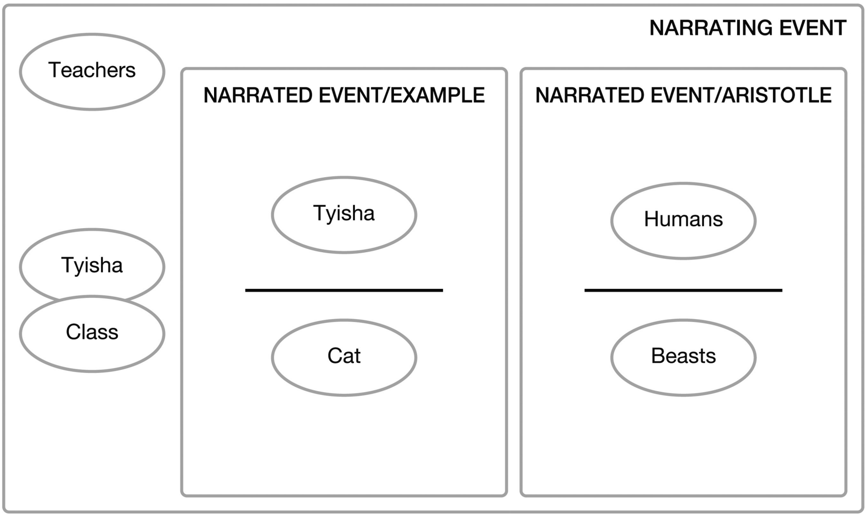

FIGURE 1.1 The example of Tyisha and her cat.

the meaning of this term if we have information about the speech event itself, specifically about the identity of the addressee. The systematic use of "he" and "you" in this and subsequent passages distinguishes two focal characters in the events described, and this ends up having implications for the narrating event.

Deictics often provide important information about the social action accomplished through discourse, because they presuppose things about the narrating event at the same time as they describe the narrated event. Distinguishing between "we" and "they," for example, does more than refer to two groups. It also presupposes a boundary between one group that includes the speaker and another group that excludes the speaker. This boundary sometimes becomes salient in social action, such as when a speaker systematically places some people beyond the boundary, in an out-group. In the classroom example of Tyisha and her cat, teachers and students use "you," "he," and other signs to distinguish between and characterize Tyisha and her cat. As the conversation continues, this distinction between Tyisha the human and her cat the beast becomes central to the social action.

Segment 2: Similarities between Tyisha and her cat

550 ST: humans can do more things than cats can do, like they can build
TYI: no that's not- just a goal. my goal is to win in Nintendo and
((laughter by a few girls in the class))
ST: that's your goal?
TYI: it's a go:al, so

555 T/B: okay maybe winning at Nintendo is like your cat's goal of getting on top of the-
TYI: right
T/B: the- the counter. but aren't- don't we have more [=
ST: [better
560 T/B: =long ranged goals than your cat getting on top of the counter, or you winning Nintendo?
TYI: but I'm just saying they're goals. you said animals can't have goals or something, so I just told ya I disagree.
T/B: okay, but can we- can we qualify that then.
565 TYI: yeah.
T/B: can we qualify that and say that man (2.0) doesn't just have immediate goals, but also has- long range goals.

In the narrated events from lines 550–558, teachers and students continue to discuss the example of Tyisha and her cat. From lines 558–567, they return to their discussion of Aristotle's and their own theories about the distinction between humans and beasts. Note the use of *reported speech* in lines 562–563. We will define this term more precisely in Chapter 2, but, for now, we mean direct and indirect reports of what someone said. Reported speech connects narrated and narrating events, reproducing and characterizing something from the narrated event to accomplish action in the narrating event. Tyisha uses indirect discourse to describe what the teacher said ("you said animals can't have goals") and herself ("I just told ya I disagree"), as she reviews what their debate is about. The teacher had claimed that animals do not have goals, but Tyisha offered a convincing counterargument with the example of her cat—who clearly seems to have goals when he jumps on the counter. At lines 555–558, the teacher accepts her argument, although at lines 558–561, the teacher goes on to propose a different kind of distinction between human and animal goals.

Here, Tyisha uses reported speech to summarize the earlier phase of the argument, in which she successfully disagreed with the teacher's claim. Thus, she explicitly marks her successful use of a counterargument. In Chapter 2, we describe how reported speech is often important to establishing social action in the narrating event. Reported speech links characters in the narrated event and participants in the narrating event, as participants put words into characters' mouths and, in so doing, inevitably characterize and evaluate them. Such identification of characters is one important device through which participants accomplish social action. Tyisha, for example, summarizes her earlier speech in a way that characterizes her past self—the person who disagreed with the teacher a couple of minutes earlier—as confident and matter-of-fact in her demeanor ("I just told ya I disagree"). This positioning helps make Tyisha herself, the student participating in the narrating classroom interaction, seem an intelligent, balanced, successful contributor to substantive classroom conversation. As we describe more fully in Chapter 2, discourse analysts should examine deictics and instances of reported speech early in their analysis—because these types of linguistic signs often do important work in evaluating characters and positioning participants.

In this passage, Tyisha characterizes her narrated self in other ways as well. By exploring these characterizations, we can analyze more fully how the narrated events become resources for teachers and students as they perform social action in the narrating event. For example, when Tyisha says that her goal is to win Nintendo video games, she might be characterizing her narrated self as pursuing rudimentary, unintellectual goals. In Chapter 2, we will describe this as *voicing*, the characterization of a narrated person as occupying a recognizable social position (Bakhtin, 1935/1981; Wortham, 2001). In this case, Tyisha might be voicing her narrated self as intellectually unengaged, as an unmotivated teenager wasting time on video games. Note that we have used evaluative language in making this characterization. It would be possible to evaluate video game playing more positively. Among a group of video game enthusiasts, for example, Tyisha's description of her narrated self could be grounds for praise or envy. But in the preceding passage, other participants evaluate it negatively. At line 553, a student says, "that's your goal?" in a disbelieving tone. At lines 555–558, the teacher compares this goal to an animal's goal. And at line 559, another student presupposes that human goals are "better," with animal-like goals, including Nintendo, thus characterized as worse.

Tyisha herself probably intended her Nintendo-playing self as an example of lower, animal-like goals, because she is arguing that humans and animals have similar goals. The teacher had claimed that humans have goals while animals do not, and Tyisha made a plausible counterargument. Now the teacher has acknowledged that animals do have goals (at line 539), but she continues to pursue the idea that humans are different from animals by introducing the idea that humans and animals have different kinds of goals (at line 558). By characterizing herself as having lower, animal-like goals—like playing video games—Tyisha presents her (human) self as having goals similar to her cat's. She is trying to win the argument by denying the teacher's claim that human goals make us different from animals.

Tyisha apparently does not anticipate the teacher's response, however. At line 558, the teacher used an inclusive "we" to refer to humans—she herself, Tyisha, and the other students are humans, and the teacher claims that all humans have goals that are different from those of animals. As the conversation continues in the following segment, however, the teachers and other students exclude Tyisha from their group. As noted earlier, deictics like "we" often make important contributions to social action in the narrating event. In the next segment, teachers and students make it clear that Tyisha is no longer included with the other humans in the category of beings that have higher-level goals. By voicing or characterizing herself as having lower-level goals, Tyisha has made herself vulnerable to this exclusion. "T/S" in this segment refers to Mr. Smith, the second teacher running this class discussion along with Mrs. Bailey.

Segment 3: Tyisha the beast

T/S: what goal did you have in mind this morning, even when you went to sleep.
TYI: ((laughing)) I didn't h(h)ave o(h)ne.
580 T/S: sure you did. didn't you- didn't you have the goal you had to wake
up at a certain time, get dressed in a- by a certain time, get to a place
TYI: yeah that's true.
T/S: so you had goals even before you s[tarted
TYI: [but not in the summertime. I
585 just got up, see, just like
T/S: ah, and in summertime when you got up because you had to come to
school what was your goal or was it to sleep until three in the afternoon? or
to get up and play with your friends?
TYI: the same goal my cat had, to go to sleep, and get up and eat.
590 T/B: ahhh, isn't that i:nteres[ting?
((rise-fall intonation contour; "mocking" effect))
T/S [a:hhhh
T/B: same goals as her (1.0)[=
ST: [cat had
595 T/B: =cat had. wow.
ST: so you are like an animal.
T/B: so you are like an animal.
TYI: I'm not saying, I just don't have somewheres to be at.
T/B: okay, but that's not- don't confuse the issue. one point at a time,
600 Tyisha. you throw out seventeen things and then- nobody can even begin
to address any of these things.
MST: tss ((hissing laughter))

Tyisha keeps trying to win the argument, refusing the distinction between her own (human) goals and her cat's goals at lines 584–585 and 589. Up until this point, the teachers have acknowledged her reasonable claim that animals and humans share some similar goals, but they have argued that people also have uniquely human types of goals. At line 590, however, they shift the interactional positioning in the narrating event. They mark this with distinctive intonation at line 590 and line 592, indicating that something important has been said or implied. At lines 593–597, one teacher states this new information explicitly: Tyisha and her cat have similar goals, and thus perhaps Tyisha is different from the rest of us humans. Tyisha has been arguing for the similarity between human and animal goals all along. But now, instead of trying to establish that all humans have some goals different from those of animals, the teachers and students argue at lines 596–597 that Tyisha in particular—unlike other humans—has goals like those of an animal. They accomplish this, in part, through the two instances of "you" in lines 596–597. "You are like an animal" sets Tyisha apart from humans by positioning her with other animals instead. They thus imply that she is different from the other students in the classroom, and perhaps that she is not fully human. At line 598, Tyisha sees the danger and tries to backtrack, but she fails.

Note how the description of a narrated event—the example of Tyisha and her cat, together with the voicing or social identification of characters in that event—has facilitated social action in the narrating event. The teachers and other students eventually position Tyisha in the narrating event as different from the rest of them, as more like an animal because of the instrumental, lower-level, short term goals that she allegedly pursues. Figure 1.2 represents the relationship between the narrated and narrating events at this point in the discursive interaction. In the narrated example of Tyisha and her cat, the characterization has shifted such that Tyisha is now positioned along with her cat as having beast-like goals. Aristotle's distinction between humans and beasts helps organize both narrated and narrating events, and, in both realms, Tyisha has switched from being positioned as human to being positioned as a beast. The dashed lines represent the parallelism established between narrated and narrating events. The teachers and other students distinguish Tyisha from themselves and position her as less than fully human, in the narrating event, by using a model of society and evaluative characterizations drawn from the narrated events. They are not talking

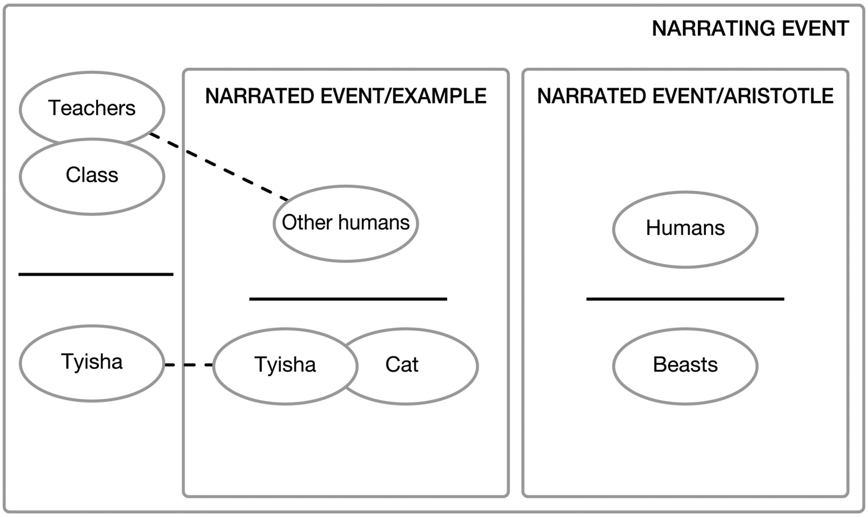

FIGURE 1.2 The outcome of the example.

simply about Tyisha the hypothetical video game enthusiast, nor are they merely discussing the narrated event involving Tyisha and her cat. They are also using these narrated events to position Tyisha herself in the narrating event. Just as a beast cannot cooperate sufficiently with others to live in human society, Tyisha cannot follow the rules of classroom engagement and participate productively in group discussion.

The last lines of segment 3 provide another illustration of how reported speech contributes to narrated events in ways that can accomplish social action in the narrating event. At line 600, the teacher says to Tyisha: “you throw out seventeen things and then nobody can even begin to address any of these things.” The verb “throw out” here describes a type of speech event, portraying Tyisha as making lots of points, in scattershot fashion, without offering others an opportunity to engage with them productively. In Chapter 2, we will show how descriptions of others’ speech are potent ways of characterizing others and accomplishing social action. Reporting others’ speech—directly, indirectly, or generically—is one crucial way speakers establish narrated events that have implications for social action. At lines 599–601, the teacher characterizes Tyisha as a disruptive student who refuses to engage productively in classroom conversation, explicitly describing her undesirable behavior. In subsequent chapters, we will see how reported speech can also more subtly contribute to social action in the narrating event by positioning narrated characters and actual participants.

The example of Tyisha and her cat begins to illustrate how discourse analysts systematically explore patterns of sign use. In our approach, discourse analysts first trace how speakers use linguistic and paralinguistic signs as they create narrated events and then make inferences about how these patterns of sign usage contribute to social action in the narrating event. In the example about Tyisha, we have illustrated the first two steps in how such analysis proceeds: first mapping out the narrated events and then looking for types of signs that often communicate information about how narrated events and characters have implications for the narrating event. Chapter 2 gives a more detailed account of how to identify particular signs that accomplish this work. For now, we have illustrated how deictics, reported speech, and voicing can provide important signals about the social action occurring.

Before offering a more detailed account of how discourse analysis proceeds, however, we must distinguish between discourse analysis of discrete speech events and discourse analysis across pathways of events. Traditionally, discourse analysis has been done on single events or on recurring types of events. Our linguistic anthropological approach to discourse analysis was largely developed for analyzing discrete events, and most of the methodological tools we present come from this earlier work. In this book, however, we extend the approach to analyze pathways of connected events over time—because many crucial human processes take place across chains of linked events. The next section describes traditional work on discrete speech events. Then, we sketch how a linguistic anthropological approach can be extended to do discourse analysis beyond the speech event.

Speech events and their contexts

The analysis of discrete speech events over the past several decades has been enormously fruitful (e.g., Goffman, 1981; Gumperz, 1982; Hymes, 1964; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Silverstein, 1992), and our approach uses many tools that have been developed to analyze individual events. Founding figures of discourse analysis such as Goffman (1981), Hymes (1974), Jakobson (1960), and others have described the central components of any given speech event. Every speech event includes *participants*—a speaker, an addressee, and often an audience or overhearers. It includes a *message*, communicated over some channel that connects speaker and addressee, "encoding" the message in some denotational *code*. The speech and nonverbal signs that constitute the event have an *organization*—at least a beginning, middle, and end, and often more complex kinds of poetic patterning. The communication takes place in some context, both a physical *setting* and a social world with *norms* about social identities and social events. The event has social *consequences* and accomplishes social action.

Different approaches to discourse analysis offer different accounts of how these elements interrelate. Our approach is not the only useful one. Different research questions will require different approaches. On our account, a discourse analyst must uncover the social actions accomplished in a speech event, and this centrally includes the social identities or positions that participants assign to themselves and others in narrated and narrating events. For example, exclusion is a type of social action, and teachers and students ended up excluding Tyisha in part by characterizing her as a "beast" in the narrated event. Participants accomplish social action in the narrating event by organizing their messages, using signs systematically to position themselves and other participants. For example, the narrated events—the discussion of Aristotle's definition of human nature and the example of Tyisha and her cat—established the distinction between humans and beasts, and speakers systematically applied this distinction to Tyisha herself so as to exclude her from the classroom conversation.

Put briefly, then, on our account, *discourse analysis uncovers the social actions performed in discursive interaction by showing how narrated characters are voiced and actual participants are positioned, as this positioning is accomplished through the systematic organization of signs that communicate explicit and implicit messages, and as this organization is accomplished by making aspects of context relevant*. Chapter 2 presents a more detailed procedure for doing discourse analysis. In the rest of this chapter, we provide conceptual background for our approach, defining central terms in the italicized sentence and describing key aspects of discursive interaction both within and across speech events. We first want to clarify that by presenting social action in the narrating event as the target of our approach to discourse analysis, we emphatically do not mean to imply that participants necessarily *intend* the social action they perform. Sometimes, participants accomplish action that they do not intend, and sometimes they are unaware of social actions that they demonstrably orient to but do not consciously understand. In many cases, discourse analysis reveals mechanisms of social action that participants use but do not consciously recognize. The parallel between Aristotle's description of humans and beasts and the teachers' distinction between Tyisha and other students with "higher" goals was a central part of the discursive mechanism through which Tyisha was excluded from classroom conversation, for example, but, in interviews, Wortham (2006) found that the teachers and students were not consciously aware of this mechanism. They were aware of the broader social function, realizing that Tyisha had been excluded, but they were not aware of the mechanisms through which this action had been accomplished.

Silverstein (1992, 1993) shows that the central problem in discourse analysis is determining *relevant context*. As described in Chapter 2, deictics, reported speech, and evaluative indexical signs, among other cues, signal relevant context. When Tyisha describes herself as playing Nintendo video games at line 551, for example, she could be identifying herself as intellectually unsophisticated. But this utterance could signal something else if different aspects of the context were salient. If everyone knew that Tyisha was a diligent student who always read more than the teachers required and conducted scientific experiments in her spare time, for example, her comment about Nintendo would more likely be a joke or a counterfactual. If everyone knew that the boys in the classroom were obsessed with video games and played them constantly instead of doing schoolwork, while Tyisha and the other girls were all diligent students, then Tyisha's comment could be read as an insult to the boys with no implications for herself. In order to interpret the implications this utterance had for the positioning of participants and social action occurring in the narrating event, we must know what aspects of context are relevant.

Relevant context becomes established as speakers organize their messages systematically, so as to foreground certain aspects, and as other speakers subsequently presuppose the same aspects of context. As we describe in Chapter 2, participants do this largely through the systematic deployment and uptake of *indexical signs* that presuppose or create aspects of context. An indexical sign signals its object by pointing to it (Peirce, 1932; Silverstein, 1976). For example, "throw out" in line 600 can describe undisciplined, careless speech—the kind of speech that disruptive, unpromising students might engage in. Participants and analysts know that this expression has these implications because it points to or presupposes many other contexts in which they have heard the term used to describe disruptive, unintelligent, or careless people. To take another example, "dude" presupposes a certain kind of (young male) speaker, the type of person who would normally use the word. Deictics are also indexical, pointing to their referents in the context—with "you" pointing to the addressee, a verb in the past tense pointing to a time prior to the event of speaking, etc.

As a speech event unfolds, indexical signs normally accumulate and point to similar contexts, presupposing certain aspects of context as more and more likely to be relevant. After Tyisha talks about playing Nintendo, the teachers return to the distinction between humans and animals without presupposing that Tyisha herself is beast-like. At line 558, the teacher's "we" seems to include Tyisha as a human like others in the class, and, at line 580, Mr. Smith describes some of Tyisha's activities as involving human-like goals. But at line 584, Tyisha points out that during the summer she has no complex goals and just lies around like her cat, and, at line 589, she concludes by saying that she has "the same goal my cat had, to go to sleep, and get up and eat." These utterances at lines 551, 584, and 589 all point to similar context as relevant—to a culturally familiar model of intellectually unengaged people who lie around and do mindless activities like playing video games.

Silverstein (1992, 1993) calls this accumulation of signs that point to similar aspects of context *contextualization*, the process through which the context relevant to interpreting a speech event is established. Over the course of a discursive interaction, a series of indexical signs comes to presuppose some aspects of the context as relevant. One sign alone cannot establish relevant context. If teachers and students had followed Tyisha's comment about Nintendo with discussion of how she is in fact a diligent student, and if she had not subsequently characterized herself as lazy in the summer, then the comment about Nintendo would not have positioned her as lazy and beast-like. But several utterances did in fact presuppose this, and, thus, that model of a beast-like, lazy person became relevant context for interpreting both the characterization of Tyisha in the narrated event and her position in the narrating event.

Even after these utterances, of course, Tyisha might not ultimately have been positioned as beast-like. Teachers and students could have switched to emphasizing Tyisha's character as a good student, or they could have talked about how inappropriate it would be to compare humans to animals. Any social action accomplished through discursive interaction can be refigured or undone if subsequent discourse provides robust enough signals to that effect. In the next class, or even years later at a class reunion, these teachers and students could have recalled this conversation and tried to establish that they were just teasing and knew all along that Tyisha was a promising student. In practice, however, relevant context usually solidifies such that participants and analysts can treat a given action as accomplished and routinely presupposable.

In Silverstein's (1992, 1993) terms, this is to say that speech events become *entextualized*. They become stable and identifiable as some kind of social action after a series of indexical signs has established relevant context, and after speakers routinely infer that a given social action has occurred. In Tyisha's case, entextualization is established in lines 590–601, as teachers and students explicitly state that Tyisha is like an animal and the teacher disciplines Tyisha for her manner of class participation. At this point, the social action being accomplished in the narrating event—the exclusion and disciplining of Tyisha—becomes firmly established, and Tyisha is robustly positioned as disruptive and failing to collaborate in class discussion, as being like a "beast" who does not participate productively in collective human activities. This social action is established as a pattern of indexical signs comes to presuppose relevant context.