François Cooren, **Organizational Discourse: Communication and Constitution**, Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015, 224 pp., $64.95 (hardcover) $22.95 (paperback)

Reviewed by
Katherine R. Peters
University of Colorado Boulder, USA

If it is generally accepted that "*communication matters in organizations*" (p. 1, emphasis in original), then how do we study communication and how it matters in organizations? ***Organizational Discourse: Communication and Constitution*** provides the answer to this question. In this accessibly written book, François Cooren introduces readers to six different perspectives that can be used to study organizational discourse. The book is organized to build the complexity of analysis and interpretation that each perspective brings to a set of data that includes transcripts, or written records of talk, thus demonstrating how readers would construct their own complexity of arguments using these perspectives.
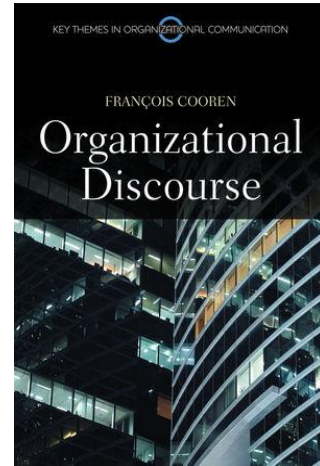
This work stems from a basic argument that discourse and communication are important to study not for how they inform others, but because communication constitutes our organizational worlds. This latter function is the focal point of the six perspectives Cooren presents and demonstrates throughout the book and is also signaled by the use of "(organizational) discourse" as a label for (organizational) communication. As the author writes,

> studying organizational discourse does not only consist of analyzing the documents and conversations as well as visual representations and cultural artifacts that compose the events and routines of organizational life, but also amounts, in its strongest version, to claiming that discourse (or communication in general) constitutes the very means by which organizational forms exist or, to put it in academic terms, are *brought into being*. (p. 12)

Built upon this foundation, the rest of the book provides methodological guidelines for approaching communication to discover how it constitutes organization.

## Context

François Cooren is a professor of communication at the University of Montreal. His work is part of a school of thought known in the organizational communication field as the Montreal School, which advocates for viewing communication as constitutive of organization (CCO; cf. Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Scholars in the Montreal School focus on the centrality of communication in organization, not merely for its informing value but also for its ability to emerge organization in the first place. Communication, thus, takes on a broader definition than merely one person talking to another person. In Cooren's larger body of

work, he advocates for viewing how nonhuman *figures*, such as documents, interests, values, and even the organization itself, are made present and act in communication (Cooren, 2004, 2010). These figures and human speakers join in the communication process, and thus speakers are both enabled and constrained in interaction in what they can and cannot do "*in the name of*" a given figure (Cooren, 2010). This process of voicing, and being voiced by, such nonhuman figures is what Cooren (2010, 2012) calls *ventriloquism*. He seeks to describe the ways in which "people are not alone on the construction site when they communicate" (p. 164).

In developing this line of thought, Cooren has faced critique by some scholars who suggest that he provides very few guidelines for how one might study communication as ventriloquism. For example, in response to Cooren and Sandler (2014), Kuhn (2014) writes,

> it is not at all clear how one is to recognize [ventriloquized] voices when one sees them. . . . As the authors mention . . . there are times when analysts must move beyond literal referents present in discourse, but when those moves should occur, how to recognize those cases, and whether those determinations should be tied to conceptions of "the" situation in which figures operate are all open—but tremendously important—questions for the applicability of the perspective. (p. 249)

*Organizational Discourse* is, then, an important addition to a larger body of work. This book develops and explains methodological guidelines for conducting analysis using the kinds of perspectives Cooren employs in his work, such as speech act theory and conversation analysis. More broadly, the methods he introduces in this book and the guidelines that he gives provide direction for scholars who want to study organizational discourse to discover how communication constitutes organization. The book also offers insight into some of the major themes of research and interest in organizational communication and organizational studies.

**Structure of the Book**

*Organizational Discourse* is thus structured with providing methodological guidance in mind. Chapter one provides an overview of the key terms to be used throughout the book—discourse, communication, organization—and the main perspective upon which the book is written, CCO. In the next chapter, Cooren goes on to detail six perspectives one could use to study organizational discourse: semiotics, rhetoric, speech act theory, ethnomethodology/conversation analysis, narrative analysis, and critical discourse analysis. He writes about the history and development of each perspective and provides an overview of how each perspective approaches discourse, and its constitutive force, differently. The chapter concludes with a table that provides a synopsis of the comparisons and contrasts among the perspectives and what analytic power they afford.

The next three chapters demonstrate the six perspectives and the differences in how they approach transcript data to examine a few central areas of concern in organizational communication studies. Chapter 3 shows how the six perspectives contribute to examining the organizational properties of communication. Chapter 4 builds on some of the analytic complexity of each perspective to demonstrate

what they have to say about organizational culture, identity, and/or ideology. In the fifth chapter, Cooren examines each perspective individually to demonstrate the full complexity of how each approaches negotiations, decision making, and power in meetings. The analysis that emerges from the building complexity of these perspectives across chapters provides some guidance for readers in how to develop such analytic complexity themselves. In the brief final chapter, Cooren reinforces the importance of communication in the constitution of organization, and, more broadly, reality.

### Opening the Black Box of Analysis

The main strength of *Organizational Discourse* is that it opens up the traditionally "black boxed" methods of analysis to detail how one uses an analytic perspective to develop claims about a set of data. The six perspectives that Cooren introduces and uses throughout the text are richly detailed, both historically and methodologically. The text shows, rather than tells, how each perspective views a given conversation differently and draws unique conclusions about what happens in communication, even when examining the same conversation. In addition to demonstrating the analytic process with each perspective, the text shows the comparisons and contrasts among the six perspectives. As the complexity of each perspective develops across the chapters, readers can see how each perspective develops a unique viewpoint on a given set of data. Thus, the book directly engages with the critique Kuhn (2014) leveled and not only describes the analytic process but also adeptly demonstrates it.

### The Black Box of Data Collection

Despite the level of attention accorded to each perspective, *Organizational Discourse* still falls short of providing specific methodological guidance for research design and data collection. Although this is not the goal of the book, readers who are new to organizational discourse research will find little in the way of guidance for the early stages of a research project. In chapter 5, which examines meeting data, Cooren uses data collected through a team fieldwork project with Médicins Sans Frontières (also known as Doctors Without Borders). He provides only an overview of the collection process for this kind of data, which includes video shadowing, and the curious reader is referred to other works that provide methodological guidance on how to conduct this kind of research (Meunier & Vásquez, 2008; Vásquez, 2013). Although the process of research design and data collection is not fully addressed, the text does not necessarily lose its power in demonstrating analysis. Readers who are new to organizational discourse research and looking for guidance on these early stages in the research process can read any number of books about discourse analysis methods to learn more about these parts of a research project (see, for example, Gee, 2014a, 2014b).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, *Organizational Discourse* provides a necessary addition to a rich tradition of research that has typically focused more on theoretical than methodological developments. The book explicitly details methodological guidance for the analysis process, and even displays how an analytic perspective is used to develop claims about a data set. By presenting six different analytic perspectives side by side and using them to approach common data, Cooren skillfully demonstrates the comparisons

and contrasts of each perspective. By showing the analytic process, readers can see how each perspective shifts the kinds of claims that result from analysis. Scholars and practitioners who are interested in how to conduct analysis that is concerned with how communication constitutes organization will find specific guidance for data analysis in this book. The book may be particularly well-received by graduate students, junior faculty, and even practitioners who aim to add their own voices to this current conversation in organizational communication.

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