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# A model of ethnographic discourse analysis for an interdisciplinary team

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to present a methodological model for analyzing the ethnographic discourse of an interdisciplinary team, which I have developed during research that examined such discourse in a special education school. This methodological model includes a processing tool for mapping and organizing data, as well as an applied methodological tool for analyzing discourse results in the form of a scheme of key-words. The analysis of discourse results is conducted along two axes of comparison: the meaning of the key word for the professional who uses it, and the meaning of the same key word for his/her interlocutors, that is, professionals from other fields. In addition, the article addresses the specific issues of collection, mapping, and analysis of data in this combined method.



The word is half someone else's.

Mikhail Bakhtin,
The Dialogic Imagination

## 1. Introduction

The research presented in this article is part of a wider research project, the purpose of which is to examine the routine workplace discourse of an interdisciplinary team working in a school for students with mental disorders in Israel. The purpose of this article is to present a model for analyzing the ethnographic discourse of an interdisciplinary team. This model was developed in the course of the wider project, and it combines two methodological approaches, discourse analysis on the one hand and ethnography on the other. These two approaches complement each other in a way that allows studying the cooperative work of an **interdisciplinary team**. Such combined examination is crucial because an interdisciplinary team is a place of encounter between several fields of specialization that use different languages: the educational language, the rehabilitative-medical language, the therapy language, and an additional shared language that emerges in the team's everyday organizational context and in the social culture of the school. In addition, it is also a place of encounter of distinct professional and emotional "worlds." Discourse in an interdisciplinary team takes place on several levels, explicit as well as implicit; it both reflects each partner's ways of thinking and creates a new reality at the same time. The common denominator for all of these processes can be found in the everyday context of events and actions, which is the area of this research.

The analysis of interdisciplinary discourse is a complex, long-term, and multidimensional process and has been defined by Linell (1998) as "discourse across boundaries" (defined in Section 1.1.1). Linell emphasizes that the construction of meaning in discourse across boundaries depends on finding the formula of mutual relationships between the different sources and the contexts of a particular discourse (Linell, 1998). The concept of context (exhaustively defined by Tracy, 1998)

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needs clarification here. Drew and Heritage (1992) distinguish between everyday contexts, such as a conversation at a family dinner (Blum-Kulka, 1997), and institutional contexts, such as a conversation between teachers at school (Ben-Peretz and Schonmann, 2000). Thus, the concept of context in discourse across boundaries does not refer to extra-subjective reality, but to reality as constructed by the terms and images that each professional uses. Context is derived from a combination of sources, such as previous or preexisting discourse, a specific environment, people and people's opinions, bodies of professional knowledge, and evaluation of the current situation (Linell, 1998). This study focuses both on everyday context (since daily staff meetings are part of the team's daily routine) and the institutional context (examining the special education school as an institution).

This research revealed that the context in discourse across boundaries is constructed along two axes of comparison: the first axis is the meaning of the key word for the professional who uses it, while the second axis is the meaning of the same key word for his/her interlocutors, that is, professionals in other fields. In order to trace the development of this discourse, it is necessary to combine ethnographic tools (including precise documentation) with carefully controlled questioning directed at elucidating the context and the culture created in this discourse. First, the theoretical platform will be presented for the two methods, discourse analysis and ethnography, with a focus on the rationale that led to choosing these methods for studying an interdisciplinary team. Then the methodological section will describe and demonstrate the innovative methodological model proposed for collecting, mapping, organizing, and analyzing data in ethnographic discourse analysis.

### *1.1. Theoretical background*

#### *1.1.1. Discourse analysis*

A review of recent literature shows that the concepts of discourse, discourse research, and discourse analysis currently have multiple definitions anchored in multidisciplinary approaches combining sociology, philosophy, anthropology, psychology and linguistics (Van Dijk, 1997b; Jaworski and Coupland, 1999; Schiffrin et al., 2003). The common assumption in all these approaches is that discourse has to do with using spoken or written language in a given context for a specific communicative purpose and a specific target audience (Celce-Murcia and Olshtain, 2000). Therefore, discourse analysis is defined as analysis of the use of language in a given context (Celce-Murcia and Olshtain, 2000). Discourse analysis focuses on examining units of language that are larger and more complex than an individual sentence and that serve the purposes of human communication of all kinds. The central principle of discourse analysis is that language is, first and foremost, a tool of communication (Folman, 2000).

The theoretical foundations of the concept of discourse in general, as well as the concept of language as a medium in which discourse takes place in every particular instance, rest on the notion that language **reflects** thinking on the one hand, while on the other hand it **creates** reality. The linguistic relativity principle (also know as the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis) is the idea that the varying cultural concepts and categories inherent in different languages affect the cognitive classification of the experienced world in such a way that speakers of different languages think and behave differently because of it (Phipps, 2001). Moreover, according to Foucault (1969), discourse is not merely language, but a system constructed by and in turn constructing reality.

One of the strengths that the field of professional discourse brings to the investigation of professions and their institutional and cultural practices is its careful and critical attention to language and the ways in which discourse practices recursively create and reflect professions in multiple ways (Barton, 2004). This duality explains the great interest of qualitative researchers in discourse analysis. Further theoretical examination reveals several aspects of this interest (though this article will deal only with aspects 2 and 3):

(1) Action: The researcher attempts to understand what an agent is doing and to understand his/her behavior through his/her language.
(2) The internal world of the agent: The researcher tries to understand and study the internal world of the agent, namely the agent's emotions, expectations, hopes, disappointments, successes, fears, frustrations, thoughts, world outlook, and view of reality, through the instrumentality of language. In other words, what is the agent's relationship with the reality in which s/he acts?
(3) The interaction between agents through social discourse: The researcher attempts to study and understand, by means of language, the social interactions taking place in a social group, in this case, an interdisciplinary team. Such interactions may enable the creation of symbols and images of status, territory, power, and authority. What does language allow the interacting agents to do? What does it prevent them from doing? Does it allow them to realize their goals? Does it assist in constructing the social reality in which they live and act? There is an attempt here to understand what language is and what functions it serves in the professional world of an interdisciplinary team. This approach is more common in anthropological-linguistic studies, which examine discourse in its social and cultural contexts in an attempt to understand how users of language generate meaning for the community of users themselves (e.g., Heath, 1983).

There exist several streams in discourse analysis, each of which is based on different theoretical assumptions and therefore poses different research questions, utilizing different concepts and ways of representing behavior and use of language. The present research analyzes ''discourse across boundaries'' (Linell, 1998), which is a concept well suited to the purpose of analyzing key words in the language of an interdisciplinary team working cooperatively in a special education school. Discourse across boundaries, according to Linell, includes intraprofessional discourse between professionals from the same field, interprofessional discourse between professionals from different fields, and professional-lay discourse between professionals and non-professionals, such as physicians and patients.

In this context, a fascinating study by Bartunek and Spreitzer (2006) should be mentioned, which examined discourse across boundaries around the concept of 'empowerment.' The authors researched the construction of this concept's meaning in the period from 1966 to 2000 among professionals from diverse fields, including religion, psychology, sociology, education, social work, and management. The research findings showed a divergency between different professionals' definitions of this term. The authors emphasize the importance of their findings for understanding the development and construction of concepts in language. The present research also examines the meaning of the same words and expressions for different specialists, as well as the responses of other professionals to the same word's usage in the discourse of their work partners.

Why is it important to present words as they are interpreted by a certain professional and to explore the way in which other professionals respond to this interpretation? Keenan (1996) emphasizes that pragmatically, the word is interpreted in the process of being used. This pragmatically assigned meaning is not necessarily identical to the normative meaning, and it is not conveyed by explicit explanation, but rather perceived while listening to the way in which a specific group of speakers employs the term, if the listener is determined to understand the speaker's intention. Identification and understanding of the meaning attributed to concepts is possible through listening to the discourse. The discourse is the principal meaning through which organization members create a coherent (logical and continuous) social reality that frames the meaning of their identity (Van Dijk, 1997a). In this article, I will present a model that allows understanding the conceptual rather than dictionary meanings of key terms and will trace the usage and meanings that members of an interdisciplinary team attribute to those terms.

The discourse taking place in an interdisciplinary organizational context is essentially pluralistic insofar as it has a lot of starting points for discussion and therefore a great potential for conflicts and misunderstandings. As Linell (1998) emphasizes, the interaction between specialists across disciplines often assumes and involves conflict between different perspectives. Contacts within interdisciplinary teams involve different kinds of professional knowledge and ideologies, dissimilar ideas, and cultural approaches and expertises that are specific to a certain phenomenon.

The theoretical basis best suited to analyzing interdisciplinary discourse is semiotics, the theory of signs. This discipline is concerned with all sign systems and not limited exclusively to words (semantics). Language is the major system of signs within the totality of signs used by humans. The core question that interests semioticians is: What are the basic conditions for effective communication? Attempts to answer this question have led to the emergence of various models, some of which can be seen as complementing each other since each of them focuses on a different aspect of communication and begins from a different starting point. These models are the referential approach, the functional approach, and the constitutive elements approach (Folman, 2000). Generally, communication is conditioned by human participants as well as by other communicational elements, namely the message is transmitted from the 'sender' to the addressee through some channel of communication. The transmitted sign takes a certain form (e.g., discussion, lecture, speech, confession, or demand) and conveys a certain message. Communication takes place in a certain contextual framework, concerning a certain theme and with a certain purpose. For analyzing the data in this article, I have applied, with appropriate adjustments, an existing theoretical model proposed by linguists Hurford and Heasley (1983), based on the elements of communication listed above. The model, including the adjustments, consists of the following questions:

1. Who communicates with whom? In this research, the question translates into ''Who is the **owner** of the term?''
2. What is the purpose of the communication? Here, this translates into **the purpose of the discourse**.
3. How is communication carried out? In this research, the **source of the term** will be pointed out, whether it was observed in meetings, used in interviews, or appeared in school documents.
4. What is the communication about? In this research, **topics** of discussion were identified at the outset (see Section 3.1 on mapping and organization of data).
5. What are the results of the communication? In this research, the question about the communication or **discourse results** will focus on the response of team members from other disciplines to the key term discussed, that is, the consequences of the communication.

This model and the adjustments that I have made provide a clear and workable protocol for analyzing each of the key terms (see Section 2.3.4).

### *1.1.2. Ethnography*

Ethnography is a branch of science belonging to socio-cultural anthropology and is concerned with the study of customs of particular societies. The ethnographic approach favors personal direct observation of social behavior in a particular society in the terms that are as close as possible to the way in which members of that culture see the universe and organize their behavior in it (Geertz, 1973, 1983). In this research, ethnography was chosen as a method for a number of reasons. First, ethnographic research in an interdisciplinary team requires the broadest, deepest and most inclusive view possible, while emphasizing what ethnographers refer to as ''obvious notions.'' Schutz (1971) emphasizes that notions accepted as obvious become social and cultural conventions, which find expression and have meaning only in the context of a specific culture. The present research focuses on key words of such a social culture.

Second, ethnographic research focuses on the research of phenomena, in this case, of discourse, from the point of view of people who engage in it. Ethnographic research allows revealing the foci of the process from a phenomenological perspective. In this study, the phenomenological approach seeks to reveal the ways in which professionals perceive and interpret the expectations directed at them by their partners at work and by the cultural system to which they belong (Schutz, 1970; Spradley, 1979). This research examines the ways in which professionals perceive, understand, feel, and interpret for themselves the cultural conceptual framework in which they participate as professionals.

Third, ethnographic methodology allows us to focus on the interactive systems and processes connected to behavioral patterns in situations characterized by complex psychological dynamics. It also enables the examination of both explicit and implicit processes in the interdisciplinary team's world and of the ways in which the team members perceive the details of their reality. Finally, the characteristics of ethnography facilitate the conduct of highly trustworthy research. For instance, long-term daily presence in the research field enables researchers to create ''thick descriptions'' (Geertz, 1990) through which they can reveal what they perceive as reality and can represent this reality to the reader, together with their insights and interpretations. The exposition of data allows readers to further validate the description according to their own sense of or acquaintance with the field under study (Yosifon, 2001). Importantly, thick description also allows for triangulation.

## 2. Methods

### *2.1. Background and participants*

The model, examples and demonstrations in this article are based on ethnographic-holistic research (Stake, 1995) conducted in 2007–2008 to observe the professional activities of 43 members of an interdisciplinary team in a special education school in Israel. The professionals were divided into four groups: teaching staff, including ten homeroom teachers, ten class assistants, two personal assistants, and seven subject teachers; care staff, including four expression therapists, one communication clinician, and one occupational therapist; medical staff, consisting of two psychiatrists; and administrative staff, including four administrators, the principal, and the secondary principal.

The school's population was comprised of children and adolescents suffering from mental disorders. The school, which in this research will be referred to as ''The Towers,'' enrolls students from age 10. According to the Israeli Special Education Law, the students remain in special education schools until the age of 21. The study day in the school begins at 8:00 and ends at 16:00.

### *2.2. Choosing the research field*

In this research, there were two criteria for choosing the research field. First, choosing a case we can learn from (Stake, 1995) means that the field is likely to lead the researcher towards a deeper understanding of the topic, clarification of terms, or applicable generalizations. The variety of specializations of the professionals working in ''The Towers'' makes it a field where one can extensively and deeply study interdisciplinary discourse. Another criterion is the research field being ''good,'' which means in this case that the school's staff is perceived as professional and open in its social environment, for example, by the school inspector, municipal workers, professionals from outside the school, parents, and students. The professional staff is confident and open and sees the research as important, as contributing to the school, and as enabling profound learning about explicit and implicit layers of the interdisciplinary team's work.

### *2.3. Research methods*

In order to adhere to research ethics, it was explained at the outset to the staff members that all the observations and interviews, including informal interviews and corridor conversations, would be documented. The research used observations, interviews, and document collection. However, the research participants' refusal of video documentation ruled out the use of this important tool for discourse analysis. However, I maintain that the characteristics of the ethnographic method (see Section 1.1.2) make it applicable even in the absence of video recordings.

#### *2.3.1. Observations*

The observations in this research were conducted in both **formal and informal arenas of discourse**. The most natural formal arena of discourse in the context of a special education interdisciplinary team's work is a staff meeting. The arenas of formal discourse chosen for analysis were recurrent ones in which there was regular representation by all the disciplines of the interdisciplinary team, including professionals from the medical, educational, and care staff (see Appendix A). The informal discourse took place outside the staff meetings, both during and after the work day.

Observations were conducted in informal discourse arenas, namely in the schoolyard during breaks, during school events, and in the teachers' room.

A full protocol of each meeting was recorded, including the names of the professionals present (a map of the meeting was drawn), the topic of the meeting, and the words of the participants. In total, 247 protocols were recorded, documenting a whole year of the interdisciplinary team's work in the school. A single observation time ranged from 5 to 20 min. Notes were taken as soon as possible after the observation was finished.

In this research, I have resolved the tension between the need for precision and the need for focused documentation according to the recommendation of Ochs (1979). That is, I established the focus of observations only after three months of observation (see Stage 1 in Fig. 1), during which I became thoroughly acquainted with the character of the observed material and began to recognize key words. The key words were chosen for two reasons: first, their frequency and availability in the discourse, and second, their openness to observation, meaning the extent to which the research participants feel comfortable using a particular key word in the presence of the observer.

In addition, non-verbal behaviors of the participants were noted down separately. Documentation was done in table format, with remarks documenting non-verbal behaviors on a separate page. The table allows for representation of detailed descriptions of situations and large amounts of additional information without breaking the flow of the writing/reading of the spoken text itself. As in any description of human behavior, describing the researched phenomenon verbally, rather than by means of a different conventional system of exact signs, contains a strong interpretive element. Geertz (1990) explained this process as follows: "What we consider as our data is really nothing other than our construct in which we describe constructs of other people" (Geertz, 1990:20–21). Awareness of the interpretive nature of descriptions of reality is less deeply rooted among discourse analysts than among ethnographers (Bucholtz, 2000). Nonetheless, the established procedures of ethnography provide a sound basis for research and confer validity on the descriptions of reality on which the data presented in this research are based.

#### *2.3.2. Interviews*

This research used the semi-structured interview, which is an essentially systematic interview allowing comparison between different interviewees' responses. This format has the advantage of being guided and focused on themes relevant to the research goals (Zabar Ben-Yehoshua, 1990). The purpose of the interview in this context was to clarify the professionals' perceptions and definitions of the key words (Munby, 1989). Accordingly, all 43 team members were interviewed and asked to define/explain their perceptions of the meaning of each one of the key words identified by the researcher.

In addition, informal interviews, or what Denzin and Lincoln (1998) call "corridor conversations," were conducted, in which the researcher conversed with team members in the schoolyard and in the teachers' room during breaks or during classes when they were free. Most of these conversations were initiated by the team members themselves. Another form of informal interview, termed "sidewalk activities" (Yin, 1991), consisted of conversations that took place while entering the school in the morning or leaving it at the end of the day, in the evenings after staff meetings, or during special events at school, such as holidays or VIP visits. The purpose of these interviews was to fill in missing information and to obtain information about the context of interdisciplinary discourse in order to achieve a fuller understanding of the issues.

#### *2.3.3. Document collection*

During the year of research, documents of the following kinds were collected: notes to the staff, notes to the parents, and routine messages to the staff concerning specific students, preparations for holidays, questionnaires prepared by the staff, reports of cases of physical or severe verbal violence, and the school newsletter. The place of each research method in the process of mapping and organizing the data will be presented below.

#### *2.3.4. The model of mapping, organizing, and analyzing the research data*

*Stage-1*: The first stage of data collection entailed the observation of verbal interactions in the field. The next stage was mapping with the search for words frequently occurring in the discourse, that is, often repeated in the interdisciplinary team's everyday working discourse. In addition to the frequency of occurrence, the researcher also checked "the validity of the next turn" (Perakyla, 1997) of each key word that was recognized in other spoken sequences preceding or following the word's position in the discourse. After the above stages and the repeated re-reading of all the observation protocols and collected documents, 77 key words were identified.

*Stage-2*: The next stage was to organize the 77 key words by discourse topic. Every meeting in which a certain key word was used was defined as a unit of analysis. In each of these units, line-by-line reading was performed with a view towards determining the topic of each line. The same analysis was performed on the interviews as well. At the end of this process, the words were divided by discourse topics, which included: specific metaphors, use of slang, expressions bearing a special meaning in the interdisciplinary context, teamwork-related words, and words related to the team's work with the student. The last category, work with the student, is the main focus of the present article. This category was chosen because it is most frequently used in the interdisciplinary discourse and was found to contain the largest number of words (17 out of 77, comprising 22%). This category is central for two reasons. First, everyone who enters a special education school has a feeling that the conversations between the professionals constantly revolve around the students. Second, the students are in fact the reason for which the interdisciplinary team works together in the school.

*Stage-3*: The third stage of data organization was guided by the question of whether professionals from a specific field use special, distinctive words. This question was answered in several stages: (a) first, all observations and interview notes were re-read in search for the first occurrence of each key word. Who was the first professional to use it? For instance, a therapist was the first to use the key word ‘‘paradoxical treatment.’’ (b) Second, it was checked whether other professionals from the same field also used the key word in question, for example, whether the rest of the therapists also used the key word ‘‘paradoxical treatment.’’ (c) Third, the definitions given by the professionals for key words in the interviews were comparatively examined, and it was checked whether identical definitions were given for the same concept by professionals from the same field. In the example used above, do all the therapists assign the same meaning/definition to the key word ‘‘paradoxical treatment’’? (d) Fourth, routine usage of the key words by the professionals was examined by means of triangulation, which is a process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, different types of data, and different methods of data collection (Creswell, 2002).

Fig. 1 provides a visual representation of the triangulation process from different methods of data collection, using the example of the key word ‘‘paradoxical treatment.’’

The three stages were carried out with all the key words. At the end of the process, it was possible to divide the key words by their professional usage, that is, by the field of specialization. The group of key words found to be used by professionals from a certain field was defined as a class (Fig. 2). This article presents classes of words originating with the care professionals, with the educational staff, and with the medical doctors. Thus, it is possible to schematically represent the structure of mapping and organization of the data for this article in the following way.

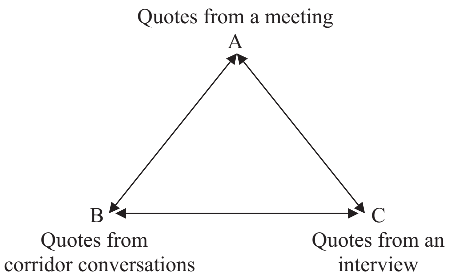


**Fig. 1.** A visual representation of the triangulation process.

| Quote – definition from an interview | Quote from a document | Quote from a meeting (therapist) | Quote from an informal interview | Quote from a corridor conversation between the homeroom teacher of pupil A. and a therapist |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| the pupil’s progress and regression | | *"The work with A. is very frustrating and a very paradoxical treatment; he progressed greatly over the past six months, but this last week we are back where we started with him.*" | | Teacher (talking about A.): “*Why are you so frustrated about the work with him? You know that with our pupils there are ups and downs.”* Therapist: “*It’s not ups and downs. He gathers up into himself, he has started functioning like a baby; all he does in the session is just doodle. He came such a long way in therapy and got on so well, it looked as if we really were on to something with him…”* |

**Fig. 2.** Visual representation of the triangulation process from different methods of data collection, using the term “paradoxical treatment”.

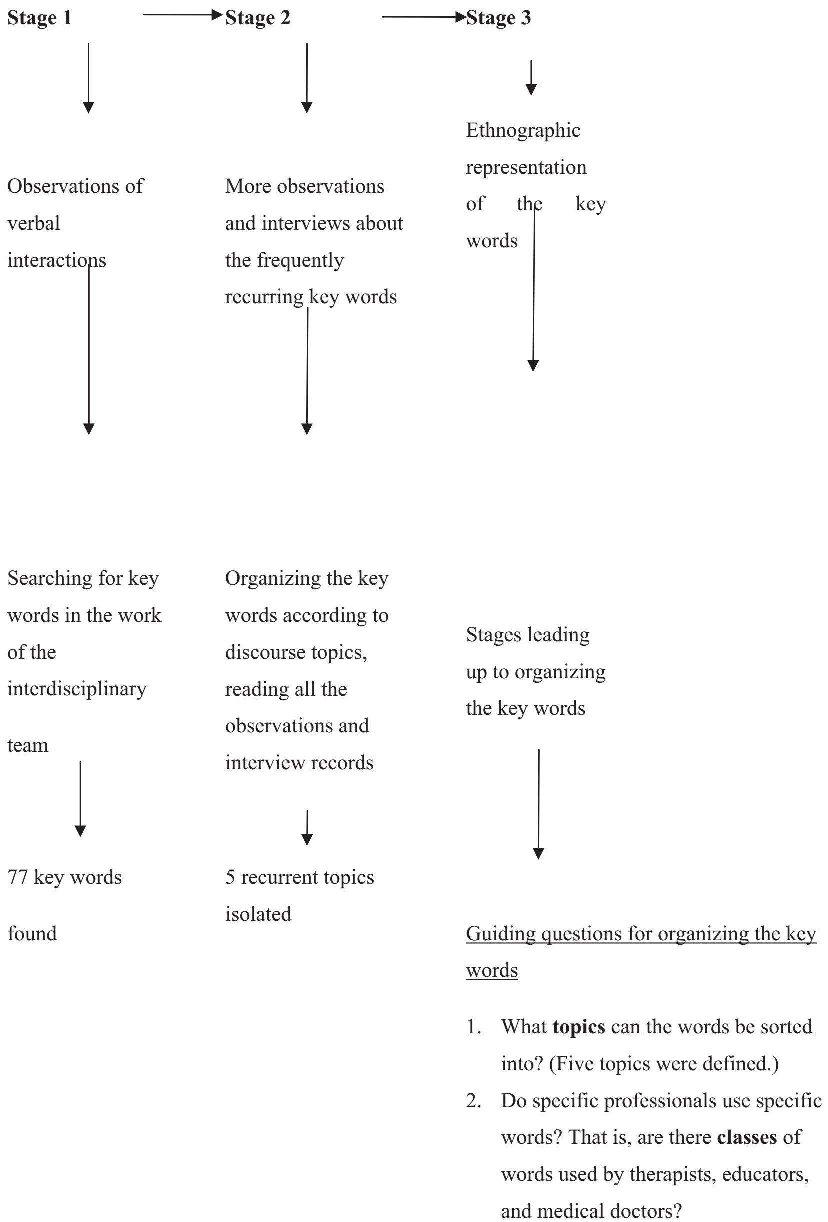


**Fig. 3.** The model of mapping and organization of research data on ethnographic discourse in an interdisciplinary team.

The process of data analysis focused on each key word's meaning according to the professional who uses the word. Based on the proposed classification into *topics and classes*, in combination with the modified abstract model of Hurford and Heasley (1983), the following guiding model was constructed for analyzing the key words:

(1) Identifying the topic of the discourse.
(2) Identifying the key word.
(3) Who is the 'owner' of the key word?
(4) The purpose of the discourse.
(5) What is the origin of the word – was it observed at meetings, used in interviews, or employed in school documents?

The guiding model presented above led to creating the following guiding model for analyzing each key word:

(a) Connecting each word to the professional or group of professionals who use it (educators, medical-rehabilitation personnel, or care personnel).

(b) Determining the meaning of the word for its professional users (examples of usage will be provided below).
(c) Determining the discourse's purpose, referring to what the professional is trying to 'achieve' by using the word?
(d) Determining the frequency of the word's use (presented in Fig. 3).

## 3. Research findings

In this section, three key words from three classes will be analyzed (bolded in Fig. 3) in order to demonstrate the application of the methodological model. Fig. 3 presents the classes of the key terms identified in the three groups of the interdisciplinary team – care professionals, educators, and medical doctors. The frequency of each word's occurrence refers to the number of times the word was documented by all the research tools in the first three months of the research.

| The key word | The professional origin (class) of the word | The frequency of the word in observations | The frequency of the word in documents | The frequency of the word in corridor conversations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| utterance [*amira*] | care professionals | 24 | 9 | 35 |
| reward/ compensation reward [*pras/ pras metagmel*] | care professionals | 25 | 30 | 52 |
| **to process an experience with the pupil [*leabed im talmid havaya*]** | care professionals | 32 | 5 | 41 |
| paradoxical care [*tipul paradoksali*] | care professionals | 32 | 7 | 27 |
| to contain [*lehakhil*] | care professionals | 40 | 15 | 64 |
| the child falls apart, flooding [*ha-yeled mitparek, hatsafa*] | care professionals | 34 | 9 | 20 |

**Fig. 4.** The frequency of use of pupil-related key words by care, educational, and medical professionals.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| clear line [*kav barur*] | educators | 22 | 13 | 33 |
| **an experience of success** [*havaya shel hatslakha*] | educators | 36 | 22 | 48 |
| to promote each pupil according to his abilities [*lekadem kol talmid be-het'em le-yakholto*] | educators | 38 | 26 | 39 |
| fruitful [*nose perot*] | | | | |
| babysitter [*beibisiter*] | educators | 40 | 3 | 7 |
| 'broken trough' [i.e., the situation of having missed all the opportunities – *shoket shvura*] | educators | 25 | 0 | 19 |
| | educators | 20 | 1 | 9 |
| story [*sipur*] | doctors | 26 | 0 | 17 |

**Fig. 4.** (*Continued* )

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| full gas in neutral [i.e., no progress in spite of apparent efforts – *ful gaz be-niutral*] | doctors | 21 | 3 | 33 |
| holding [i.e., maintaining patients in their current mental state in an attempt to prevent further deterioration - *holding*] | doctors | 38 | 11 | 44 |
| **dangerous to himself, the environment and the family** [*mesukan le-atsmo, la-sviva u-le-mishpakha*] | Doctors | 24 | 19 | 35 |
| fire extinction [i.e., taking care of emergencies – *kibuy srefot*] | doctors | 61 | 3 | 2 |

**Fig. 4.** (*Continued* ).

### *3.1. The class of words originating with the care professionals*

"To process an experience with the pupil" is an expression frequently used by the therapists. According to their perception, the purpose of their work with the pupil is to process the experiences, thoughts, and feelings that the pupil presents to them. The mental contents that originate in the pupil's world can be represented by various media in different forms of therapy: conversation, drawing, music, or drama. The purpose of all these kinds of therapy is to allow the exposure of mental contents, which leads to emotional learning. Such learning does not occur after a single session, but rather is a time-consuming process. A good example is the following description of processing an experience with L., presented by a therapist at an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting:

"*. . . For weeks and weeks, he draws the same monster. He tells a very interesting story about it; he has an ongoing dialogue with it. In the beginning, he drew it and then tore up the sheet and threw it into the dustbin. In response to my question about why he threw it away, he answered: it has to die, it is a monster. In the next stage, he stopped tearing up the sheets and started telling me about how the monster was feeling; it really was scary, he said, and it was burning with anger. In the present stage, he draws it in brighter colors. There is a feeling that the monster has calmed down, that it is more gentle. He uses yellow, red and green, whereas at first it was only black and black. In the drawing from yesterday, there appeared to be a smile on the monster's face. Through it he tells about his feelings; he talks about it in the third person and makes a*

> *projection onto it. He is going through a deep mental process, and I think that we will soon say goodbye to it [the monster]. We keep all the drawings; sometimes he asks to go back to them and to look at the earlier drawings. He looks and smiles; sometimes he looks at me and says: "Do you know that the monster is not angry any more?"*

Rosenheim (1990) describes this process as follows: "The dynamic therapy deals with motives that tend to be long-standing, involved, and emotionally charged. Usually the road to lasting change is not broken open in a dramatic act, but paved by the accumulating weight of understandings and new experiences, which appear from different angles and in different contexts. Internalization of emotional learning is called 'processing the experience.' This process is not short or easy because the patient needs repeated and varied opportunities to 'document' what is taking place and to become convinced that it is both possible and useful to adopt alternative perceptions and reactions, which are disclosed to him during therapy. For the most part, understanding is an indispensable condition for a real renewal in the motivational-emotional structures of the patient" (Rosenheim, 1990:25).

It is revealed in the interviews that the educators see the processing of experiences with the pupils as the purpose of the therapists' presence in the school. The teachers do not use the term "processing an experience," but use other terms instead to express the same idea. As one teacher explained: "*Their [the therapists'] most important function here in the school is to 'get through to the child'*." Another homeroom teacher at the high school level reiterated: "*The purpose of their presence in the school, as I see it, is to get into places that I, as a teacher, cannot get into and have no tools to work with; they work with them [the children] on the emotional-mental part, on contents that disturb the child and do not allow him to be free for learning*." This sentiment was echoed yet again by a homeroom teacher at the elementary level: "*They have a very important function because they can get with children to such points where they can work on the inside, on the contents that the child brings, in order to organize them*..."

### 3.2. The class of words originating with the medical doctors

'Dangerous to themselves, their surroundings, and their families.' The doctors use this term in cases where they perceive the pupils as constituting a danger to the people around them and to themselves. According to Elitsur et al. (1994), an emergency situation is defined as follows:

> Emergency situations in psychiatry, as in general medicine, are situations that demand immediate intervention by the doctor in order to prevent loss of life. Beyond preventing loss of a patient's life, emergency intervention is also meant to deal with dangers stemming from the patients' lack of control over their impulses or their behaviour. In such situations, they are liable to be dangerous to themselves and their surroundings. In these situations, there can be long- or short-term harm to the patients, their families, or their surroundings.

In these situations, the psychiatrist acts by recommending that the pupil be sent home or sometimes hospitalized. As one psychiatrist reported at a meeting of the team: "*R was hospitalized this morning because he went wild yesterday in class. He physically attacked staff members and other children*." Other team members may adopt the concept and use it when they think a pupil does not belong in the school. For example, the headteacher, talking about a pupil at an IEP meeting, argued: "*This pupil is dangerous to himself and his surroundings. If he stays at the school, it will end in a catastrophe*." When pupils are deemed as dangerous to themselves and their surroundings, the psychiatrist is called in urgently to intervene. At a meeting with a psychiatrist about a pupil who had gone wild during the day, the therapist said: "*The child is a danger to himself and his surroundings. That is the main criterion*."

### 3.3. The class of words originating with the education professionals

'Success experience.' The meaning of this concept for the teachers who use it is to create a situation in which the pupils can succeed in coping with the syllabus prepared for them. The aim is to give them the motivation to continue learning. However, this solution is not accepted or recognized by the other team members, who do not agree with the teachers' method. In the therapists' and doctors' opinion, only the pupils' psychological health and their achieving the goals set for them in the work plan can constitute a success experience. For example, a psychiatrist said at a meeting of the team: "*We can't know if R's therapy has succeeded because it is still going on. Only at the end will we be able to say that we have achieved our aims, that we have succeeded*." Likewise, a therapist stated in an IEP meeting:

> *"If R. is hospitalized again, we will not have achieved the therapeutic goals we set for him; this is certainly not a success experience. The process was correct, it was appropriate, but we cannot define this as a success since we did not complete it. He'll come back here after his hospitalization, but it's by no means sure that we will be able to carry on from where we left off".*

The words of the doctor and therapist indicate that their understanding of the concept 'success experience' is different or is defined differently from the term as used by the teachers. It seems that they do not accept the rationale of the success experience.

## 4. Discussion

The discussion sets out to answer the question of what can be learned by means of key words about the culture of the interdisciplinary team, or in other words, what are the results of the discourse? Specifically, do professionals from other fields understand the key words in the same sense as the professional who originally uses them? These questions will be answered by means of an organizational tool that was developed for analyzing discourse results: the scheme of "word transferability." "Transferability" was defined as the ability of a professional from a given field to translate a certain word from a different field of specialization into his/her professional language. As presented in Fig. 4, the scheme consists of several degrees of transferability that can be distinguished between a transferable and a non-transferable word in the interdisciplinary team's discourse.

Key words that were found to be **transferable** between the team members include, for example: "an *amlani* pupil" (a pupil with limited working and adaptation abilities), "preparation for life," "independence." These words are transferable since all the members of the interdisciplinary team use them and assign them the same definition. The fact that these words are transferable means several things. First, these key words represent part of the overall goal of the school, which is preparing the student for independent life after graduation. Second, these key words are introduced to the team in administrative circulars and in common professional training; thus, the meaning of these key words has been learned by the team as a whole (Fig. 5).

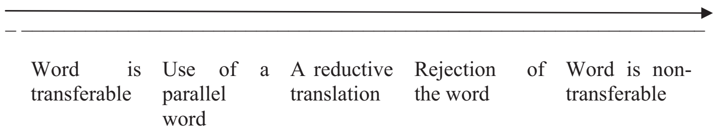


**Fig. 5.** Scheme of key word transferability.

In contrast to the key words that are transferable as part of the discourse, the other categories on the transferability scale represent divergent discourse results, such as the **use of a parallel word** derived from a different professional arena. The example discussed above was for the expression "to process an experience with the pupil," which was translated by homeroom teachers as "getting into deep/internal places with the child."

An example of a **reductive translation** is the use of the word "containment" by the educational staff. The word originates in the discourse of the therapy staff and refers to an important working tool of human presence, the purpose of which is to accompany the pupil while giving him/her the opportunity to express pain, anger, fear, and other negative emotions (Manor-Binyamini, 2007). In the process of transfer, the word is reduced by the educators, who use it in the sense of physical space and location. In one case, a homeroom teacher described a pupil who she deemed to be out of place in the school: ". . . the school cannot contain him; he has to be in a different place."

Sometimes the professional understands a word originating in a different field of specialization, but does not agree with, does not accept, objects to, or **rejects** the word. For instance, the word "story" used by the medical staff, is not accepted by either the care professionals, who use "dynamic diagnosis" instead, or by educators, who use "didactic diagnosis" or "IEP."

Finally, there are words that are **non-transferable**, being foreign to the experience of the professional. For example, the educators use the word "fruitful," which is foreign to the experience of the rest of the professionals in the school. According to the medical professionals' perception, the pupil is either healthy or ill, and in the care professionals' perception, when therapy becomes "fruitful," there is no longer any need for therapy.

The scheme of key word transferability and the examples above raise the question of how it is possible to know whether the key word is transferable in the discourse or not and where it is located on the scale of transferability. Thus, the extent of key word transferability was established according to three criteria (all of which are process criteria, i.e., they had been applied throughout the research year):

(a) The principle of interdisciplinary triangulation was observed, meaning that transferability was checked from at least two disciplinary standpoints to take a reliable measure of it. Thus, for instance, each definition of a key word was examined through comments by professionals from the two other fields. Each of these specialists was asked in an interview to comment on the ethnographic definition of a key word originating in a different field. This allowed them to say that they did not understand the word or that they rejected the definitions given by the professionals from the other fields. Through this process, there arose categories that provided the basis for the word transferability scheme presented above.
(b) The principle of method triangulation, according to which every category on the transferability scale, for example, rejection of the other professionals' definitions, is examined with three methodological tools: interview, corridor conversation, and observation.

(c) Returning to the research participants with the researcher's interpretation of the key words and addressing their response to this interpretation.

Discourse analysis allows the researcher to trace implicit themes and the ways in which they are understood, as well as the emergence of new knowledge, in the research participants' discourse in its everyday social context. The uniqueness of the model presented in this article is that it allows researchers to identify key words in the language of an interdisciplinary team working in cooperation and to represent their meanings as the team members perceive, understand, and define them. It also enables them to analyze the ways in which professionals respond to the key words in the discourse of professionals in other fields, as well as to examine the functions of the words used in a particular professional culture and the function of language in general in interdisciplinary professional culture.

The ethnographic discourse analysis adopted here allows a profound examination of change in the processes of learning and professional development in social sciences in general and in education in particular (Titscher et al., 2000). It enables a representation of the work culture that emerges from the interplay between the formal and the informal aspects of organizational life. Moreover, it provides researchers with tools for examining the cultural knowledge, behavior, and artifacts that participants share and use to interpret their experiences in the group The ethnography of discourse conceptualizes meetings as communication events that must be examined because they are embedded within a socio-cultural setting as a constitutive social form.

Finally, ethnography differs from other forms of research in that the researcher does not automatically presume that s/he knows what questions to ask, but rather needs to uncover the questions that should be asked. By studying the culture, ethnography leads to discoveries and enables the researcher to focus on questions that could not have been posed in advance. In the present research, the focus on and the crucial role of language and discourse arose in the course of the fieldwork. In other words, it only became clear in the course of the fieldwork that language and discourse are key components, rather than merely contributing factors, in interdisciplinary work.

In addition, analyzing data through a method based on ethnographic discourse analysis, as presented above, allows us to address questions related to the work culture of an interdisciplinary team in a special education school. In this regard, three central points should be emphasized: (1) characterizing the communication and decision-making processes in the organization; (2) the influence of key words on the distribution of power (power relations) and vice versa; and (3) how communication takes place in tangible ways:

(1) Characterizing the communication process: In all the meetings, speech was used as the major channel of communication whereby all the participants interacted with one another as the speaker/sender vs. the hearer/receiver of messages. The type of speech encouraged is a relatively formal one, requiring some prior knowledge of and familiarity with the students, the way of speaking at a formal meeting, and sufficient experience with the professional jargon. It seems that the main rule of interaction at these meetings was turn-taking.

    The decision-making process followed the same pattern, for the most part, with the discussion hinging on the professional rationale of the individuals and the different points of view of the professional groups (medical, educational, and/or therapeutic). As the meeting began, a professional problem or a difficulty in the work with a particular student was presented, solutions were discussed, and a decision was made. The final decision was based on negotiation and compromise between the individuals and the groups. The development of the discussion depended on the team adopting a majority vote decision rule, though there was often pressure for a consensus. The framework of the meeting was always the same, yet there was a pattern of movement between the modes of reason and the passion, which included the use of jokes, sarcasm, drama, and argument.

(2) The influence of language on power relations and vice versa manifested itself in the team's negotiations over a new definition of the situation. All the members of the interdisciplinary team come to the interaction with concepts formed in the course of their training and professional experience, that is, with professional preconceptions. Their use of language exposes diverse conceptualizations or definitions, leading the way to interdisciplinary conflict.

    At this stage, conceptualization takes place in the course of the meeting as a shared interpretive action of all the members of the interdisciplinary team. The professional comes face to face with the other partners in the interaction, and in collaboration with them seeks a shared definition of the situation and engages in other interpretive actions. In the negotiations that are conducted in collaboration with the various teams of experts, the professionals consolidate their professional and social status. The members of each professional group attempt to persuade the others to accept their definition of the situation. It is reasonable to assume that the professionals whose definition of the situation is accepted will grow in social and professional status and will be in control of the definition of the situation, giving them the power and control over the other team members.

(3) Conducting cooperation in a tangible way: The meetings were conducted as a relatively formal event, with one of the team members functioning as the meeting facilitator. Meetings were restricted to team members only and were often treated as very private and confidential occasions. During the meetings, there was the expectation that everyone would speak, though some team members spoke more than others. It seems that the team aim was to get results, and cooperation was manifest in a number of ways and revolved around specific goals. The tangible components of cooperation are: the topics on which cooperation is taking place, such as presenting and discussing the diagnostic

findings, defining the purposes and goals of working with the student, and reporting on the status of the student's difficulties. The character of cooperation is mostly cognitive, but at times emotional and conducted with the purpose of sharing, that is, with the intent for another professional to listen, sometimes analyze the situation and/or express an opinion, and less often to construct together a program or a theme. Cooperation as it was observed in the present research can have several purposes, including informing, seeking advice, and sharing (for more details on the purposes of cooperation, see Manor-Binyamini, 2003).

### *4.1. Concluding remarks*

In conclusion, it seems that the ethnography of interdisciplinary discourse of the kind presented here, accompanied by precise documentation and long-term presence in the research field, promises discoveries that could not be available on a different path of research. Much work is still needed to study the ways in which discourse analysis contributes to enriching the professional abilities of interdisciplinary team members. However, it is already possible to say that such analysis opens access to central issues of interdisciplinary cooperation that should attract more research attention than it has thus far. It is also possible that this methodological framework could be applied in analyzing other arenas of discourse, such as the discourse between parents and children or women and men.

## Appendix A. Formal arenas of discourse of the interdisciplinary team

| The kind of formal arena | Central purpose | Participants | Frequency and length of meetings |
|---|---|---|---|
| IEP (Individualized Education Program)[a] meetings. | Discussing the care of the pupil. | All the team members working with the pupil, about 20 participants in total. | Elementary school: weekly, on Tuesdays, 2–3 h. Advanced school: weekly, on Thursdays, 2–3 h. |
| Pedagogical meetings. | Discussing the class composition; making a CEP (Class Education Program). | All the team members working with the class. | In the beginning and the end of the year. |
| Administrative staff meetings. | Solving organizational and administrative problems. | Representatives of each professional field, about 8 participants. | Twice a week, Tuesday evenings and Thursday afternoons. |
| Prolonged study day team. | Working meeting. | All the team, about 25 participants. | Once in two months and as needed. |
| Institutional advanced studies. | Learning theory and practical tools for working with the pupils. | All the members of the interdisciplinary team. | Once a week, 2–3 h. |
| Supervision (team guidance). | Processing of emotional contents. | Administrative team. Elementary school team. Advanced school team. About 8 people per meeting. | As needed. |
| Professional team meetings. | Elucidation of core problems. | Professionals from all the fields, 30–40 people. | As needed. |
| Event planning. | Event preparation. | All the team members related to the event. | Before holidays and special events. |

[a] IEP, Individualized Education Program: according to the Special Education Law, the interdisciplinary team is obligated to prepare a special program for each student studying in a special education framework. This program includes the student's profile, the purposes and goals of working with him/her, the planned ways of achieving the goals, and the evaluation.

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