

**‘LAUGHTER’ IN THE CRAGS:
EXPLORING DISCOURSE
DURING ROCK CLIMBING**

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the discourse constructed during the adventure sport of rock climbing. The researchers adopted a discursive psychology position from which they captured the discourse of rock climbers busy doing rock climbing. This captured discourse was then analyzed according to the principles of discursive analysis. It was found that the rock climbers employed various discursive resources during the rock climbing discourse. However, the researchers choose to focus on the discursive recourse of ‘laughter’ and how it was employed to manage interactional difficulty during the rock climbing experience.

Key words: Adventure sport, rock climbing, discursive psychology, discursive analysis, laughter.

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INRODUCTION

The history of rock climbing can be divided into various time periods. The first period, which preceded the 1700’s, was characterized by people climbing as a means to survive.

People had to climb to migrate, to find food, to escape predators and floods, and to defend themselves against attacks by gaining the advantage offered by higher ground. The second period, which followed after the 1700’s, was typified by people now climbing out of desire, rather than for survival (Long, 2004). For these first climbers the summit of the mountain was the ultimate goal and the safest and most natural passage was via glaciers and snow slopes. Once the easier routes up these mountains had been conquered these early climbers found that they needed some more specialised climbing skills in order to attempt routes that were more difficult (Ashton, 1988). The turn of the 20th century hallmarked the third period which introduced rappelling (abseiling), heavy steel carabiners and pitons to create safety in climbing. Throughout Europe, especially Germany and Austria, climbing standards underwent a steady ascent, up until the outbreak of World War II. During the war period there was very little climbing activity but the technological advancements made during the war had its benefits for climbing. However, after the war there was a surplus supply of army pitons, lightweight aluminium

carabiners, and strong and lightweight nylon ropes. During the early 1960's the first specialised climbing shoes made their appearance on the market and with their smooth rubber soles and stronger friction capabilities on rock lead to even further and higher standards. From the 1970's climbing was completely dominated by American and English climbers and the methods and equipment used had become more or less homogenised into what it is today (Creasey, 2001). This study focused on a form of climbing known as sport climbing as opposed to other forms thereof (e.g. traditional rock climbing, free solo climbing, indoor climbing, ice climbing, bouldering and buildering). Sport climbing is the most commonly practised form of climbing in South Africa (SA) and comprises climbing on routes that are protected exclusively by bolts, as opposed to traditional climbing, where the protection is provided by gear placed by the leader.

PROBLEM

This study forms part of a larger inquiry into discourse in sport and more specifically into discourse in adventure sport (e.g. Human & Du Preez, 2006). The larger study aims at examining the performative aspects of discourse (in talk and text) in adventure sport as a phenomenon that 'does' something and

where a variety of discursive resources are employed (constructed nature of discourse) to achieve the phenomenon at stake (constructive nature of discourse) (Lowe, 1991; Potter, 1996, 1998; Wetherell, 2001). Thus, the research project studies what discourse 'does' in the context of adventure sport, by focussing on a phenomenon that is being negotiated between the interactional participants (Abell & Stokoe, 2001; Wiggins, Potter & Wildsmith, 2004). However, the use of discourse *during* rock climbing has not yet been studied and research on the adventure sport of rock climbing has been largely confined to studies of a quantitative nature by researchers in the sport sciences (Booth, Marino, Hill & Gwinn, 1999; Quaine, Martin & Bianchi, 1997; Watts, Joubert, Lish, Mast, & Wilkins, 2003; Watts, Newbury & Sulentic, 1996; Wright, Royle, & Marshall, 2001) with limited attention from researchers operating from a sport psychology perspective (e.g. Campbell, 1997; Meadows, 2001). Thus, the problem addressed by this research related to how discursive resources were employed *during* a rock climbing discourse. Consistent with the larger research focus, the research question of the current project was: 'What discursive resources were employed during a rock climbing discourse?'

METHOD

Research Context

Two rock climbing contexts were used in the study, namely 'Bronkies Crag' and 'Chosspile Crag'. 'Bronkies Crag' is situated at the Bronkhorstspuit dam in Gauteng Province, SA. At these venues the spectrum of routes available to rock climbers ranges from 'beginner' to 'extremely difficult' routes. 'Chosspile Crag' is situated at the Hartebeespoort dam in the North West Province, SA. Here the rock climbing routes range from being 'moderately difficult' to 'extremely difficult'.

Research Participants

The research project included five rock climbers aged between 22 and 35 years, with between one to six years experience in rock climbing. They are all known to one of the researchers who is an experienced rock climber, and therefore the sampling method can be described as convenient sampling (Guy, Edgley, Arafat & Allen 1987). The five participants in the research were regarded as adequate because discursive psychology (DP) research is firstly interested in discourse rather than the people generating the discourse and secondly, a larger number of discursive recourses are likely to emerge from a smaller number of participants and therefore a small sample size is adequate

for DP research (Potter, 1998; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Research Stance

In this research project the researchers adopted a DP approach to studying rock climbing discourses. DP focuses on the performative aspects of discourse in the interaction between people by studying discourse in talk and text (Potter, 1996, 1998). It makes use of the following basic principles: Firstly, discourse is situated which means that talk and text are embedded within a specific context (Abell & Stokoe, 2001; Potter, 2003a, 2003b.). Discourse is situated sequentially meaning that every talking action happens either before or after another talking action (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2001; Potter & Edwards, 2001); discourse is situated institutionally of which the rock climbing was relevant to this study by means of the two institutional roles adopted by the climbers, being that of a leader and/or a belayer (Schegloff, 1997; Wilkinson, 2000); discourse is situated rhetorically meaning that discourse can be constructed and delivered in such a way that it acts to counter any response, expectation or interpretation that could be counterproductive to what is intended by the discourse (Abell & Stokoe, 2001; Wiggins, Potter & Wildsmith, 2004).

Secondly, discourse is action-orientated (Potter, 2003a, 2003b). Many schools of thought in psychology (e.g. cognitive psychology) hold the position that discourse merely reflects the inner world of a person. Discourse is therefore descriptive and passive in nature. However, there are also schools of thought in psychology (e.g. discursive psychology) that hold the view that discourse 'does' something; it is action-orientated. Discourse is therefore active and constructive in nature (Lowe, 1991; Wetherell, 2001). Lastly, discourse is constructed and constructive. In interaction, discourse is constructed by means of people employing various discursive resources. People employ, for example, words, metaphors, idioms and rhetoric to construct discourse (Potter, 2003a, 2003b). Furthermore, discourse is not just constructed but it is also constructive in that it shapes the phenomenon that is being negotiated between the interactional participants (Abell & Stokoe, 2001; Wiggins, Potter & Wildsmith, 2004). This study was done from a DP stance and therefore these basic principles will guide the current research.

RESEARCH DATA

Gathering

The data that was gathered consisted of naturally occurring conversations that

transpired during the rock climbing experience. Naturalistic interaction includes any interaction that would have taken place regardless of the involvement of the researchers. The rock climbing event was therefore not specifically set up for this research project and would have taken place irrespective of the research. The aim of studying naturalistic interaction is to reduce the effect of the researchers' preconceived ideas on research findings (Potter, 2003a, 2003b).

Analysis

During the rock climbing experience the data was recorded by use of electronic, audio-taping equipment. The data was then transcribed *verbatim* according to the notation system of Jefferson (see appendix)(Finlay & Faulkner, 2003; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2001) by means of a personal computer (PC) and Internet downloadable Transanna software and analysed by means of the process of discursive analysis (Speer & Potter, 2000; Willig, 2001).

RESULTS

The research revealed that the rock climbers made use of various discursive resources during the rock climbing discourse including pauses and delays, intensifiers, discourse markers, factual

descriptions, loud expression of words, change-of-state-tokens, disclaimers, extreme case formulations, agreement-implicative-acknowledgement-tokens, justifications, hedge words/devices, overlapping speech, previous experiences, and laughter.

It is the latter of these strategies, namely laughter that is used as example of how discourse was during a rock climbing discourse. Laughter is portrayed for the purpose of this article, not because it was employed more often than the other discursive resources but because within the context of rock climbing which has within it an inherent difficulty it was employed to accomplish various tasks and actions beyond the everyday expectation of its use. This allows illustration of the constructed and constructive nature of discourse in the sport of rock climbing.

Two extracts are presented to illustrate the use of laughter as part of a discourse during a rock climbing experience. The presentation of the extracts and the analysis thereof are presented henceforth.

Extract 1:

1 Climber 4: °we:ll° if you're happy (1.0) then we're happy
 2 Climber 1: (0.7) >are you gonna belay? <=
 3 Climber 2: =>YES ready< (2.3) °ri::ght° now we just need a ROPE heh heh heh

4 Climber 4:[heh heh] <O::H I see> but I have a tendency to
 5 forget those? when I climb (1.2) heh heh heh heh
 6 (1.3)
 7 C4, 2 &1: heh heh heh heh heh heh

The first part of this extract (ln 1-3) is an interaction between C4, C1, and C2, in which an invitation to start climbing and an acceptance of this invitation is found: °We:ll° if you're? happy (.) then we're happy' (ln 1), and '>JA ready<' (ln 3). The use of the word "if" (ln 1) set up the action for which it provides an invitation as an action to which there are certain conditions. These conditions presuppose that the climber has to be ready and that all safety procedures are in place or had been done. Lines 1-3, thus, set up an action that is to follow, and it is immediately after this invitation and the acceptance thereof that the first indication of difficulty could be identified. The pause of 2.3 seconds could be an indicator of interactional difficulty. According to Jefferson (1984), pauses of more than one second are indicative of trouble-talk by the speaker, in other words the speaker is having difficulty when it is his turn at talking, and it also serves as an invitation by the speaker towards someone else to join in the conversation. Secondly, Potter and Wetherell (1987) state that participants also listen very attentively to delays, and pay close attention to what follows after a delay.

Confirmation of this interpretation is found in line 3 where C2 is engaging in interactional difficulty and trouble-talk when he says: ‘=>YES ready< (2.3) °ri::ght° now we just need a ROPE heh heh heh ‘. He also seems to be employing the pause as a resource to focus the attention of the other climbers on what he is about to say. In line 2 C2 utters a soft sound ‘° Ri::ght °’. The manner in which he uses this word indicates that it is employed as personal self assurance that he is now ready to start climbing. He then follows this soft utterance with the phrase ‘°now we just need a ROPE heh heh heh’’. In this phrase there are three features that need to be considered namely the words ‘°just’’, and ‘°ROPE’’, and the laughter at the end of the phrase indicated by ‘°heh heh heh’’. Firstly, the word ‘°just’’ is an intensifier, which serves as a discourse marker to place emphasis on what is to follow in the sentence (Peters, 1995). By using this intensifier, C2 places the emphasis on what they now need, i.e. a ‘°ROPE’’. Secondly, C2 also emphasizes the word ‘°ROPE’’ further by uttering it very loudly. According to Peters (1995), the loud uttering of a word serves as an exclamation to express various emotions and/or worried expressions, depending on the context. Thus, in line 4 the loud utterance of ‘°ROPE’’ can be seen as an indication of C2’s emotional reaction to realizing that he

has done all his safety checks and presumes himself to be ready to start his climb, but he has forgotten to attach a rope to his harness. Thirdly, at the end of line 4 we find an expression of laughter by C2. This could function as a time-out during trouble-talk or indicate interactional difficulty. Furthermore, Findlay and Faulkner (2003) also note that laughter occurs when an utterance is unexpected, and also serves as an invitation to take up the option of laughing together. We can thus assume that C2’s realization that he has neglected to attach his rope was unexpected for him and this might have caused him some interactional difficulty, to which he oriented with laughter. The expression of laughter in line 4 also functions as trouble-resistance. According to Jefferson (1984) trouble-resistance occurs when a participant expresses laughter while talking about his troubles and functions as a management strategy - in this case to manage the occurrence of trouble-talk. C2 expresses laughter while talking about his neglect of safety measures to indicate that, although it is troublesome to him, he will not let it deter him from his goal of climbing. As stated above, laughter also acts as an invitation to join in the laughter. In line 4, 5, and 7 we see the laughter expressed by C2 as indication of this function thereof as other

climbers join in the laughter to manage the interactional difficulty they encountered.

Extract 2:

- 1 Climber 2: are we uuhh >taking that one?<
 2 Climber 4: >yes sure take the GREEN one< it has saved my ass a couple of times heh heh heh heh
 3 Climber 1: DON'T fall on that rope o.k?
 (1.2) it's just for m(h)en(h)tal backup(.) heh heh heh heh
 4 Climber 4, 3: [heh heh heh heh heh]
 5 Climber 2: (2.7)thanks! you're >SO motivating today.< (0.9) °no pressure now° heh heh heh
 6 Climber 4: WELL (.) thats not too: far from the truth! heh heh heh heh
 7 Climber 1: [heh heh heh heh]

In line 1 C2 says: ‘‘Are we uuhh >taking that one?<’’. In this line C2 places the focus on the climbing as a group activity by using the word ‘we’, instead of ‘I’. The utterance ‘‘uuhh’’ which follows ‘we’ indicates a delay strategy, which is associated with trouble-talk and interactional difficulty, and it is used in error avoidance formats and occurs immediately before problematic elements (Jefferson, 1974). While keeping this in mind when examining the rest of line 1, we can assume that the incidence of accelerated talk ‘‘>taking that one?<’’ poses some form of interactional difficulty for C2. Therefore, we can consider it as trouble-talk. The trouble-talk enters when C2 realizes that there is more than one rope to choose from, as indicated by the use of the word ‘‘that’’ in line 1. The acceleration of talk in this phrase indicates that the decision about which rope to choose, is a

decision which C2 would like to get over with as soon as possible, that could further emphasize the interactional difficulty which he encounters. In line 2 we find C4’s response to the question posed by C2 regarding which rope should be used. C4’s answer utilises accelerated speed and orientates C2’s inquiry about which rope to use in the same manner that C2 poses the question.

Just as the decision about which rope to use is one that C2 wants to resolve as soon as possible. The effect thereof is that C4 provided a quick and decisive answer. The speeding up of C4’s talk in line 2 also makes it difficult for anyone to interrupt him, and therefore it facilitates effective decision making as well as the avoidance of arguments (as to which rope should be taken). C4 emphasizes his decision by highlighting by uttering ‘green’ much louder than the surrounding words and by using rising intonation. According to Jefferson (1984), the use of emphasis and intonation can mark turn completion by the speaker. In the remainder of line 2 we find C4 talking about previous experiences that he has had with the specific rope: ‘‘it has saved my ass a couple of times heh heh heh heh’’. In this line he talks about how the rope has protected him a couple of times in the past, then he starts to laugh,

which is indicative of interactional difficulty and trouble-talk. We can thus assume that something about those prior experiences is troublesome for C4, as it causes him to employ a strategy to manage the trouble-talk in which he finds himself engaged in. In line 3 C1 enters into the conversation with a serious comment in response to C4's laughter expressed at the end of line 2. However this serious comment is not directed at C4, but at C2. Here we once again find trouble-receptiveness as exhibited by C1's serious comment (ln 3) in response to C4's trouble-resistance in line 2. In line 3 C1 enters into the conversation with: "DON'T fall on that rope o.k? (1.2) it's just for m(h)en(h)tal backup(.) heheheheh". In this turn C1 uses trouble-receptiveness in response to C4's trouble-talk in line 2, by responding with a serious comment. C1, furthermore, uses various resources and strategies during his turn to emphasize his point and to confirm C4's statement that the rope in question has been used previously by them. Firstly he starts off his statement with the word "DON'T" which he speaks much louder than the rest of the sentence, then he places considerable emphasis on the word "that" to specifically indicate the green rope which they have decided to use. C1 then ends off the first part of his turn with the word "o.k?". In line 3 he is making a statement

about the rope, but he constructs it as a question directed at C2, he then follows this by a pause of 1.2 seconds. This, could indicate that C1 is engaging in trouble-talk as indicated by the pause, which is longer than 1 second. This pause might also serve the purpose of focussing attention on and setting up the next phrase as something of importance (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In the next part of C1's sentence (ln 3) "it's just for m(h)en(h)tal backup(.) heheheheh" he employs laughter as a strategy to manage his trouble-talk. First we found the pause of 1.2 seconds and now he laughs while uttering the word "m(h)en(h)tal" as indicated by the parenthesised h's within the word, and then the brief pause (.) after the word "backup". The statement that C1 makes about the rope is clearly very troublesome for him and causes interactional difficulty. This could be because of the prior experience that he has had with the rope, or because he is uncomfortable with allowing someone else to climb with inadequate resources (i.e. rope at the end of its lifespan and which he considers as unsafe for climbing). At the end of line 3 C1 once again uses laughter as a management strategy for his trouble-talk and uses it as an invitation to the other participants to join in the laughter as a strategy to manage the sensitivity of the interactional difficulty.

C4 and C3 orient to it as such as they join in the laughter in line 4. In line 5 C2 starts off with a pause of 2.7 seconds which is an indication of interactional difficulty and trouble-talk (Jefferson, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This interactional difficulty is a result of the statements made by C4 and C1 in the preceding lines 2-4. C2 did not orient to either of the invitations to join in the laughter in lines 2 and 3, nor did he orient to the question by C1 in line 3. He remained silent throughout those two lines, but now, in line 5, he starts off with an indication that he is encountering interactional difficulty, and then further on in the line he uses accelerated talk, which indicates that he wanted to get past this point of the interaction as soon as possible because it is of a troublesome nature to him. C2 then again uses a pause (0.9), which is close to one second in duration and can therefore be interpreted as another indication of trouble-talk and as a delay to set up what he is about to say as being important. He follows the pause with ‘°No pressure now° heh heh heh’. In this utterance we find two further indications that C2 is troubled, firstly, the soft utterance of the phrase as indicated by the degree on both sides, and secondly, the use of laughter at the end of his turn. Therefore, it is clear that the interaction that has just occurred and the statements that have been made are very troublesome

for him - he uses management strategies such as laughter in an attempt to deal with it. In line 6 C4 orients himself to the statement made by C1 in line 3, regarding the rope. C4 starts off by using the word ‘WELL’ in conjunction with a short pause as a delaying device to indicate interactional difficulty. Pomeratz (1984) states that the word ‘well’ is often used as a preface to disagreements and indicates discomfort. As people are faced with conflicts they use disagreement components first, rather than disagreeing straight away. These are called weak agreements because they are used to preface a disagreement. In this interaction C4 uses the word ‘WELL’ and the short delay to give himself time to assess C1’s statement in line 3. He then realizes that he disagrees with C1’s statement, but he manages the disagreement by using a weak agreement. At the end of line 6 C4 once again uses a management strategy (laughter) to handle the interactional difficulty through laughter. We see in line 7 that C1 oriented to this laughter as an invitation to join in it when he engages in laughter himself. This laughter may also be used as a strategy to set up what is to follow as being very important.

CONCLUSION

Laughter is very often in everyday life associated with humour and/or irony.

There is research that indicates that it can also be associated with managing difficulty during discourse, also called ‘trouble-talk’ (e.g. Findlay & Faulkner, 2003; Jefferson, 1984). In this study it became clear how rock climbers employed laughter as a discursive recourse to manage difficulty during a rock climbing experience.

The study indicates that the use of PD in the arena of adventure sport has a great deal to offer researchers. One particular benefit is the opportunity it gives that the role of the sport psychologist is extended to ‘during’ or ‘on the field’ settings. It illustrates the benefits that can arise by taking research matters out of the traditional psychological context and into the naturally occurring situations, in which all people find themselves everyday. By doing this, the field of sport psychology is broadened as it allows for different ‘texts’ to be included within the scope of interest of the practitioner.

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APPENDIX

[A single left bracket indicates the point of overlap onset.

] A single right bracket indicates the point at which an utterance or utterance-part terminates vis-à-vis another.

= Equal signs, one at the end of one line and one at the beginning of a next, indicate the absence of a discernable gap.

[] A combined left/right bracket indicate the simultaneous onset of bracketed utterances. It is also used as a substitute for equal signs to indicate the absence of a gap between two utterances.

(0.0) Numbers in parenthesis indicate elapsed time in silence by tenths of a second.

(.) A dot in parenthesis indicate a pause within or between utterances, which is noticeable but too short to measure (less than a tenth of a second).

___ Underscoring indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude. A short underscore indicates lighter stress than does a long underscore.

: : Colons indicate prolongation of the immediate prior sound.

The length of the colon row indicate the length of the prolongation.

: : and __ Combinations of stress and prolongation markers

indicate intonation contours. If the underscore occurs on a letter before a colon, it

'punches up' the letter, i.e. indicates an 'up - down' contour. If the underscore occurs on a colon after a letter, it 'punches up' the colon, i.e. indicates a 'down -up' contour.

Arrows indicate shifts into higher or lower pitch than would be indicated by just the combined stress/prolongation markers.

. , ? Punctuation mark signify normal intonation, not grammar.

. For downward, ending intonation

, For continuative intonation

? For rising, questioning intonation

! Exclamation marks are used to indicate an animated or emphatic tone.

WORD Upper case indicate especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk.

The degree sign is used as a 'softener'. Utterances or utterance parts bracketed by degree signs are relatively quieter than the surrounding talk.

.hhh A dot-prefixed row of h's indicates an in-breath. Without the dot the h's indicate an out-breath.

Wohhrd A row of h's within a word indicates breathiness.

(h) A parenthesised h indicates plosiveness. This can be associated with laughter, crying, breathiness, etc.

() Empty parenthesis indicate the transcriber's inability to hear what was said. The length of the parenthesis indicate the length of untranscribed talk.

(word) Parenthesised words are especially dubious hearings or speaker-identifications.

(()) Double parenthesis contain transcribers' descriptions rather than, or in addition to, transcriptions.

r*ight An asterisk following a consonant indicates a 'squeaky', crisp, hard, or dentalised vocal delivery.

ä,ë,ï Two dots (umlaut, diaeresis) serves as a hardener, as well as a softener.

(b) A parenthesised italicised letter indicates an incipient sound.

- A dash indicates a cut-off

>< Right/left carets bracketing an utterance or utterance-part indicate speeding up.

<> Left/right carets bracketing an utterance or utterance-part indicate slowing down.

? The pound-sterling sign indicates a certain quality of voice, which conveys suppressed laughter.

(∅) A null sign indicates that there may or may not be talk occurring in the designated space. What is being heard as possible talk may also be ambient noise.

heh heh Voiced laughter. Can have other symbols added, such as underlinings, pitch movement etc.

sto(h)p An h in brackets within a word signals laughter within speech.