4. Introduction

- **Attitude**: how someone feels about something at a point in time or in a social context for example;
- Research tends to look at everyday situations, e.g. attitude to others who are different or attitudes to practices such as drug taking;
- **Allport (1935)** defined attitude as a *learned, consistent bias (positive or negative) towards something*;
- **Eagly and Chaiken (1993)**: an attitude is a *psychological tendency* shown by how something is evaluated.

These definitions suggest that:

- attitudes are **consistent and stable**;
- questionnaires might be a good method to use if attitude is shown by how we respond (but if it isn’t, they wouldn’t be ...);
- attitude varies from positive to negative so might be measurable using quantitative methods;

*(but this is DD307 so we know this line of argument is just preparation for saying that all this quantitative thinking is rubbish ...)*;

- **Behaviour** is what people do; **behavioural intentions** are what they would do if they were not prevented from doing so (physically or because others would disapprove etc.);
- Many models use the three concepts of **Thought** (cognition), **Affect** (emotion) and **Behaviour** (conation), but the focus is usually on behaviour;
  - Attitudes might have underlying **biological, unconscious** and/or **identity** influences.
  - They can’t be observed directly, only the resulting outcome (behaviour, expression) can be seen, so what’s often considered most important is **how attitudes explain behaviour** and **how they can be affected by behaviour such as past experience**.

**Reading 4.1: ‘Attitudes versus actions’ (LaPiere, 1934)**

- This is a two-part study that used a **field experiment** followed by a **survey** (so cognitive social in nature);
It challenges whether questionnaire responses actually mirror attitudes - suggests that they do not;

Hotel and restaurant staff served Chinese people in reality but they claimed in the questionnaires that they would not.

LaPiere travelled around the U.S. with a Chinese couple - they had no problem being served in restaurants or admitted to hotels (refused in one out of 250) - he concluded on the basis of this field study that ordinary Americans had no distinctively negative attitude towards Chinese people;

However in a follow-up attitude survey by post after six months, 92% of respondents said they would not admit/serve Chinese people (controls gave similar indications);

He concluded that actual experience does not reflect questionnaire responses, and that hence questionnaires may not be useful or valid for attitude research (though OK for simple data gathering);

His rationale was that questionnaires don’t seem to be applicable for predicting behaviour or tendency to act because answers may or may not indicate what respondents would actually do compared to what they say they would do;

His recommendation was that while questionnaires are cheaper, attitude researchers must observe actual behaviour in social situations.

This highlights a difference between qualitative and quantitative approaches - a good guess at a relevant factor is better than an accurate measure of an irrelevant one!

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### Reading 4.2: ‘From intentions to actions’ (Ajzen, 1988)

This paper uses a study by Manstead (1983) on attitudes to breast vs. bottle feeding of babies:

- This study used a questionnaire to survey attitudes to breastfeeding compared to bottle feeding
- Statistical analysis was used to generate numerical values for
  - participants’ belief ratings,
  - their evaluations of behavioural outcomes and
  - their mean normative beliefs and motivations to comply

This paper by Ajzen uses the results of Manstead’s research to test two behavioural models:

**Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA):**

- People do things they think will have a positive outcome and that they think other people important to them (referents) will not disapprove of (behavioural intention is affected by attitude towards a behaviour and subjective social norms);
- One or other of these factors might be more important in particular situations or between different people;
The theory suggests that

- People's **behavioural beliefs** influence their attitudes, e.g. if they believe a behaviour is "good" they may have a positive attitude towards it ("I believe walking the dog helps me to stay fit" suggests a positive attitude to walking the dog);
- If a person believes that most of their referents would approve of a behaviour they will feel **social pressure** to act in that way.

Behaviour is determined by beliefs:

- A person's beliefs about **consequences** of a behaviour influence their **attitudes** towards the behaviour, which affects their behavioural **intentions**, which in turn affects their **behaviour**;
- Their beliefs about referent expectations influences their **perceived/subjective norms**, which affects their **behavioural intentions** and hence their **behaviour**.

**Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB):**

- However factors outside one’s control may prevent behavior, and control over behaviour is a continuum (from being able to control your behaviour completely to having little or no control);
- **Motivation may remain even if intention is prevented** (you may still want to do something even if others who need to be involved refuse to):
  - Example: if a person wants to have children but their partner doesn’t;
- It may be possible to collaborate with someone else to achieve the goal or the plan may have to be abandoned (at least temporarily);

- The Theory of Planned Behaviour expands the TRA to explain how behaviour is affected by “**perceived behavioural control**” (how easy or hard it is to perform the behaviour);

- It suggests that an **intention to behave will be stronger** if:
  - **attitude** and **subjective norms** are favourable and if
  - performing the behaviour is **perceived to be easy**.

**Ajzen** argued that the results of Manstead's study support the relationships between attitude and behavioural factors posited by the TRA and TPB.

**Commentary**

**LaPiere (1934) asked:**

- How do attitudes predict or determine behaviour?
Are questionnaires a valid tool for attribute research (he thinks not)?

- He concluded that **attitude is indicated by declared intention** to act in a particular way, but that **attitudes don't predict behaviour**;

- **Azjen (1988)** re-analysed a questionnaire-based study by Manstead to argue that intention to do something relies on factors such as:
  - the perceived value of the action and its perception by esteemed others (TRA)
  - as well as the ease or otherwise of performing the action (TPB);

- He concluded that attitude is a numerical value based on factors to which numerical values can also be assigned, i.e. **statistical significance can predict behaviour/attitude**.

- Both LaPiere and Azjen focused on individuals, not the wider social context and attitudes as **products of society**;

- A different type of approach may be needed to research this (I wonder what that might be?)

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**Reading 4.3: ‘Unfolding discourse analysis’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987)**

- In this reading, **Potter and Wetherell (1987)** put social context ahead of individual attitude;
- They **question whether attitude and behaviour are linked** (like LaPiere) and whether an attitude is really a mental state regarding an ‘**object of thought**’;
- They **criticise the quantitative approach** (e.g. as advocated by Azjen), and **advocate a qualitative, interpretive approach**.

- **McGuire (1985)** defined an attitude as **“the locating of an object of thought”** (the thing the attitude is towards) “**on a dimension of judgement**” (typically from unfavourable to favourable):
  - Example: “How well (implies a dimension from ‘Very badly’ to ‘Very well’) do you think the government (object of thought) is performing?”

- Potter and Wetherell identify three **methodological issues** typical of quantitative attitude research in a questionnaire-based survey of attitudes towards “coloured immigrants” by **Marsh (1976)**:
  - use of **loose definitions**, e.g. “coloured immigrant” seemed to include any colour, as well as coloured residents, and used biased terms (“Who hates the Blacks?”);
  - McGuire translated the scale of “sympathy” used **into one based on hostility** for analysis - this mapping may not be valid;
  - the research assumed that **people’s attitudes are stable**, that what they marked in the survey actually indicates how they feel about the topic **irrespective of the situation or circumstances**.

- In contrast the discourse analytic perspective claims that **attitudes are taken up in response to the situation at hand**;
- By looking at **how texts are organised** and **what effects this organising causes** it aims to avoid:
  - assuming the existence of ‘**attitudinal objects**’;
  - translating from actual responses to analysts discourse;
  - assuming that attitudes expressed are permanent rather than contextual;
- The writers use a study of open-ended interviews with white middle-class New Zealanders about Polynesian immigrants to illustrate the effects of three factors in attitude research - **context**, **variability** and **constitution**:
- **Context:**
  - Even just a bit of context can radically change interpretation of a reported utterance:
    - Working with large chunks of talk is more complex than with simple utterances that can suggest one attitude but turn out to be very different when **examined in context**, e.g. “I think X ...” followed much later by “… but what I mean is …” or “I’m not anti X ...except ...”;
  - Discourse facilitates **tasks** such as blaming, disclaiming etc.
    - People use **contrast structures and conditionals in talk to help package up the message**, make it more convincing etc.
    - They may also **normalise contentious opinions** by using **extreme case formulations** such as “As **everybody** knows ...” or “**Nobody** in their right mind would argue ...”;
  - People use **disclaimers** to avoid criticism by moderating extreme positions: “I’m not trying to blame them but ...”;
  - It can’t just be assumed that someone filling in a scale is reporting their attitude, they might be using it to do work such as disclaiming - and different people may have different reasons in mind when responding to the same question.
- **Variability:**
  - **Discourse contains contradictions** - this patently makes it hard to measure underlying attitude if that is assumed to be stable ...
  - This may be due to different contexts, e.g. “If A then I think X but if B then I think the opposite of X” (“Should we have more freedom of speech?” “Yes of course, if it doesn’t cause problems, but if it does then we need to be more careful”);
  - This is not a problem for discourse analysis as the main interest is in the **purpose** rather than the **content** - what the talk (as an indicator of attitude) is being used to achieve.
- **Constitution:**
  - In traditional attitude research the **object of thought** and the **attitude to it** are considered to be separate;
  - In discourse analysis, the person’s representation of the object of thought at **this place and time is constructed through discourse**, i.e. it doesn’t necessarily exist beforehand and it’s not an objective measure/mental state that just needs to be revealed;
    - The person with the attitude doesn’t take an existing definition of the object of thought and say how they feel about it, they **actively define the object of thought as they describe what they think about it** - their description creates the object of thought in question;
This enables them to shape up arguments and put warrants (justifications) forward for these as they talk.
  ○ On a Likert scale for example, the assumption that all respondents are using the same object of thought is flawed - they each have to construct a version of the object of thought before they can score it.

- To get around these three problems discourse analysis looks at how expressions are used in everyday language and what the effect of this is, not at the underlying attitudes.

### Conclusion

- Discourse analysis sees talk as social with attitudes constructed in talk that hence can’t be evaluated quantitatively in isolation;
- People don’t generate “new talk”, they take up ideas and arguments from the social context (but someone must be first to come up with these?);
- Potter & Wetherell use “discourse” to mean talk but also the meanings that are constructed in society and the resulting power relations (after Foucault);
  ○ Example: “immigration” needs understanding of concepts such as “nation state”, “territory”, “us/them” for us to construct personal meanings;
- Discourse analysis and discursive psychology (which came after discourse analysis) consider the person to be made up of multiple selves that are generated by the context (and presumably based on previous experience).
- However the majority of attitude research is still in the mainstream tradition.