Discourse Analysis and Foreign Policy Analysis: Introducing Speech Act Theory in European Foreign and Security Policy

Sébastien Loisel

Abstract
This paper elaborates on an FPA approach of EFP and on the added value of certain social constructivist approaches relying on discourse analysis. While discourse analysis has sometimes been presented as competing with traditional approaches of FPA, both can also be seen as complementary, we will draw on a revised FPA framework (White, 2001) and highlight how a discourse analysis approach can help understanding the integration and formulation of European foreign policy, i.e. the processes through which actors interact to define issues on the European agenda and build up capabilities at both national and European levels. We suggest too that discourse analysis approaches can also account for the patterns framing the use of these capabilities in given contexts to achieve particular outcomes, and therefore shed new light on the implementation of European foreign policy. These approaches provide interesting and complementary tools for an analysis of the patterns and processes of foreign policy. In the case of EFP, they help overcome some of the major limitations of the EU-as-an-actor approach (focusing on policy patterns rather than processes) and structural perspectives (mostly confined to macro-level analyses). Patterns and processes need to be analysed jointly if one is to develop comprehensive foreign policy analyses connecting agent-based and structural factors.

1 This paper is still an early draft and should not be quoted. Comments however most welcomed!
2 PhD candidate in International Relations, Reader in European Foreign Policy and International Relations, Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris
There is arguably a strong relation between the current crisis of FPA and the progressive development of European foreign policy (EFP). The latter has indeed been widely analysed as one of the main theoretical challenges for FPA (White, 2001; Carlsnaes, 2004) in a period when the sub-discipline is facing a relative derelection from students of international affairs (Carlsnaes, 2002). Alternative perspectives to the study of EFP have begun to show limitations particularly when it comes to micro-analyses and the different actors involved in European foreign-policy making (Smith, 2003; White, 2004; Youngs, 2004). An FPA approach to EFP might therefore offer promising insights in the very field in which it encounters some of its most daunting challenges.

The use of an FPA approach in European foreign policy studies requires however both methodological shifts and a theoretical adaptation. White (1999, 2001) among others provides an in-depth analysis of the former and calls for a revised FPA to include other actors than States only and to focus on wider governance networks rather than governmental processes. White also points to the necessity of adopting an eclectic theoretical approach to FPA, and calls on mid-range theories to diversify and widen its explanatory capabilities.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to this theoretical FPA eclectism by assessing the added value of social constructivist approaches based on discourse analysis. While discourse analysis has sometimes been presented as competing with traditional approaches of FPA (Wæver, 2002), we argue that both can be seen as complementary. We will draw in this respect on the revised FPA framework devised by White (2001) and highlight how specific discourse analysis approaches can help understanding (1) the processes through which actors interact and define issues on the European agenda (the formulation of European foreign policy) and (2) the patterns frame the use of capabilities in given contexts to achieve outcomes (the implementation of European foreign policy).

The first section offers some preliminary reflections on a theoretical approach to the analysis of foreign policy in a European context. The next three sections are dedicated to an analysis of EFP, by identifying first the theoretical challenges it raises and then the overall relevance of an FPA approach for its study. The specific contribution of discourse analysis will be evaluated in the last two sections. It will be assessed in comparison with other approaches focusing on ideas, values and identities, whether social constructivist or liberal. We will then elaborate on the role of speech acts in discourse analysis, a dimension well developed security studies but seldom introduced in constructivist studies of foreign policy.

We therefore argue that specific attention should therefore be paid to the “speech act” processes in the formulation of European foreign policy. These discourse analysis frameworks provide interesting and complementary tools for an analysis of the patterns and processes of foreign policy. In the case of EFP, they help overcome some of the major limitations of the EU-as-an-actor approach (focusing on policy patterns rather than processes) and structural perspectives (mostly confined to macro-level analyses). Patterns and processes need to be analysed jointly if one is to develop comprehensive foreign policy analyses connecting agent-based and structural factors.

1 - Preliminary reflections on a theoretical approach to foreign policy in a European context

Why elaborate on an appropriate theoretical approach to EFP?

Analyses of foreign policy in a European context have mushroomed in the recent years and their focuses have been increasingly diversified. They now span over many different issues ranging from EC external trade and development aid to diplomatic initiatives and military issues (Bretherton and Vogler, 1998). They also cover almost every geographical areas in the world, whether on specific issues or on a cross-pillar basis. Studies of foreign policies in Europe have also focused on the
transformation of national foreign policies (Tonra, 2001; Manners and Whitman, 2001; Hill, 1998) and foreign policy-making systems (Hocking and Spence, 2002) in relation to the developments in the field at the European level. Last but not least, while these developments have yet remained largely confined to the borders of the continent, interest in the study of EFP has gained importance in other areas, not least in the US but also on other continents (Ortega, 2004). While a sign of strong and renewed interest in EFP, this proliferation cannot occult two persisting concerns concerning respectively the appropriate theoretical approaches for its study and the very definition of its field (or explanadum).

Whether there have been enough to reach a critical mass and evaluate different theoretical approaches is still open to debate (Jorgensen, 2004b: 14). This should not however preclude investigations in EFP theory and further attempts to theorise in the field. The lack of conceptual clarification has favoured centrifugal forces (Carlsnaes, 2004) and prevented the understanding of the bigger picture. Studies in EFP have more or less been based on ad hoc theorising, without proper definitions and rigorous assessments. Theory certainly must not prevent successful researches, and it is and should remain to a large extent a side-product of particular research projects rather than their prerequisite. However theory matters at least in four different respects. It is first a requirement for a cumulative body of knowledge (Carlsnaes, 2002), even if limited to a particular theoretical paradigm. Theory also allows for comparative studies, in our case between national foreign policies and how they have been transformed or they have adapted to European decision-making processes. Theories provide a set of hypotheses and methodologies that can be applied or adapted to different but similar objects. Without a proper theory it seems further difficult for research to provide well-grounded predictive claims.

There is a fourth and last interest in reflecting on EFP theory and confronting pre-existing approaches to EFP. Theory indeed has a constitutive dimension: the theoretical lens one adopts directly contributes to the construction and representation of the object of one’s study. There is yet little agreement on the definition and delimitation of the field of EFP. Several questions can be raised as whether the EU can be said to have a “foreign policy”, and whether this implies that one considers the EU as a State-like entity (Bretherton and Vogler), whether EFP should focus solely on CFSP and ESDP or include the external relations of the European Community and/or the external dimension of first- and third-pillar policies. Issues also arise when it comes to determining whether this field of research should encompass studies in the integration of foreign policy (and therefore a focus on its evolutionary nature) or conversely researches in the Europeanisation of national foreign policies (and thereby differentiate internally between at least two levels of analysis). Often choices are made on pragmatic concerns, setting the scope of the object in relation to the research agenda and the feasibility of the study. One cannot be satisfied in the long run with such an ad hoc approach to the field even though such pragmatic concerns are hardly avoidable. This alone is a major incentive to consider and elaborate on the theoretical dimension of EFP studies.

Mapping the different theoretical approaches to EFP

The mere number of studies in EFP may well have not reached a critical mass allowing for systematic comparison and assessment of their respective theoretical paradigms, but it seems that almost every option has been applied, as with realism, neo-liberal institutionalism, regimen theory and world systems theory for instance in the case of CFSP (Jorgensen, 2004b: 14). This seems to originate in the very position of EFP within the discipline of international relations as a whole. However one defines it, EFP stands at the intersection between international relations, foreign policy and regional integration literature and its students have accordingly drawn on theories developed in each of these fields. When widening EFP to encompass not only CFSP, but also the Community’s external policies and national foreign policies the proliferation of theoretical paradigms seems even bigger, as it encompass not only structural approaches but also foreign policy analysis and regional integration theories. Thus the wider the field, the more theories are eligible to claim for explanatory power, the bigger risk of a confusion which could ultimately be damaging to the field (Carlsnaes, 2004).

Some of the most distinguished researchers in the field have tried to provide an overview of the existing approaches, and further to classify them according to their fundamental theoretical characteristics. Among them three stand out by the scope of their analysis:
Ben Tonra (2000) provided a remarkable attempt to delineate current trends in EU foreign policy studies. He compares 6 different approaches and establishes two criteria to differentiate studies focusing on CFSP and those encompassing CFSP and EC external relations, and studies considering EFP as a *sui generis* object or a set of policies comparable to those of either a State or an international organisation.

Brian White identifies two dominant approaches to EFP analysis, a structuralist one attempting to provide an explanation of actor behaviour as a function of international institutions and one focusing on the role and impact of the EU as such in international relations, which for want of an appropriate term he coins “the EU-as-an-actor”. Given their respective limitations on agency on the one hand and on policy processes on the other hand, White introduces in contrast a promising framework for analysis drawing on FPA and to which we will return in the next section (2001, 2004).

In a short and as yet unpublished paper (2004), Walter Carlsnaes refers explicitly to Ben Tonra’s attempt to map European foreign policy studies and updates his overview of the field. He proposes a two-by-two matrix distinguishing studies locating explanatory power in structures or agents and considering policy processes as outputs (with a focus on external behaviours) or as goal-oriented actions (focusing on self-conscious actors).

These successive attempts are good reminders of the dynamism of the field, which is involved in a process of constant redefinition. However useful, trying to devise a table classifying the main theoretical options available in the field remains a daunting task, let alone sketching an overall theoretical framework. It shows however that an FPA approach does not hold a monopoly on foreign policy in a European context and that it consequently has to justify its claims in front of competitors.

2 - The challenges of foreign policy analysis in a European context

As argued above, pragmatic difficulties should not prevent attempts at theoretical clarifications in the study of foreign policies in the European context. Several issues in this respect await the scholars interested in theoretical approaches to EFP, among which (1) the very definition of the field and (2) the definition of “theory” and most importantly for our reflection (3) the specific theoretical challenges raised by the study of EFP as we have defined it.

1. **What is the scope of European foreign policy?**

While the phrase “European foreign policy” has been gradually accepted by a good number of researchers in the field (Carlsnaes, 2004), its scope and definition remain open to debate. While most scholars concentrate either on CFSP, or a particular EC external policy, and others write on the Europeanisation of national foreign policies, White defines EFP as encompassing all three forms (or types) of foreign policy in the European context all three which he terms the Union (EU) foreign policy, the Community (EC) foreign policy and national foreign policies (1999: 46-7). White however rejects Waever’s claim that EFP studies manage to take into account the “simultaneity of unitness” of the EC/EU and its member states (Waever, 1994: 247-8; White, 1999: 48). Notwithstanding the increasing intertwining of the different forms of foreign policy constituting EFP, he judges this task to be too ambitious for a practical research agenda and argues that the three forms of foreign policy should be studied for their own sake. EFP would rather be a field of research encompassing at least three heterogeneous objects than a defined object, and it remains therefore opened to further differentiation.

White’s opposition is motivated on the pragmatic necessity to keep manageable units of analysis for research purposes. His claim therefore is based on an understanding of theory as providing a framework for specific research agendas. One could however also expect from a theory to provide an
overview of the field pointing to specific challenges for research rather than a research agenda per se. In this perspective White’s approach seems to fall in-between, with EFP being too wide to serve as a basis for a research design (and therefore requiring further differentiation) and nevertheless falling short of encompassing the interactions between the three forms of foreign policy he differentiates as potential objects of research. The precise definition of EFP therefore depends on what one ultimately expects from a theory, and hence how one understand what a theory is.

(2) What is a theoretical approach to foreign policy analysis in a European context?

The first challenge therefore directly triggers questions about what we call a theory, i.e. what we would consider a “theory” or an “analytical framework” as opposed to a “pre-theoretical approach”. Of concern here is the status of the options available, and in particular the nature of discourse analysis (Waever, 2004: 213-4) and foreign policy analysis (White, Carlsnaes) on which we will draw in the next section. The main alternatives standing out of the matrices and typologies designed by Tonra, White and Carlsnaes and the issues they encounter point to at least three different theoretical levels according to the degree of abstraction and the nature of the issues:

- An ontological level is often referred to as “meta-theoretical”, particularly to distinguish between positivist and post-positivist approaches and their respective views of what (social) reality consists in.
- At an intermediary level, epistemological issues can be raised in what is more commonly termed a “theory”. Such issues include agent-structure problematique (White, 2001) and whether foreign policy should concentrate on the analysis of behaviours or self-conscious actions (Carlsnaes, 2002).
- At the lowest level of abstraction, theory supports empirical research by defining the most appropriate methods applicable in a field or to a particular object. White’s distinction between policy processes and policy outputs arguably counts as a methodological issue.

Accordingly each level seems to enjoy a relative degree of autonomy from the level above. An ontological choice for instance certainly restrains epistemological and methodological options, but it does not necessarily determine them. It would otherwise not be possible to design any of these options in a two-by-two or three-by-three matrix. This does not mean that all options are compatible and all combinations coherent. Furthermore at all three levels a third alternative is open in the few cases we have outlined which is to combine both elements (e.g. to concentrate on processes and outputs, or to find a way to integrate both structures and agents). Consistency will however have to be tested at each level and in each choice. We will henceforth draw on this three-layered understanding of “theory” to propose a distinction between an analytical framework and a theoretical framework. The latter is understood as a framework implying particular choice at all three levels. An analytical framework could be defined in opposition as an approach pointing only to epistemological and/or methodological options, without directly taking stocks at the meta-theoretical level. Although both can be characterised as theories or theoretical approaches, they do not share the same ambitions.

(3) The challenges of EFP study

Such an understanding of theory and a wide definition of EFP raise however particular challenges against which FPA approaches to foreign policy in a European context need be tested and for the study of which they need to be properly prepared. The heterogeneity of the actors involved in EFP and the evolutionary nature of its structures indeed raise issues quite similar to those identified by Carlsnaes (2002): the dynamics of foreign policy change, the agency-structure problematique and the role of ideas in the explanation of foreign policy. These issues can arguably be distributed at each of the three levels of theory we have differentiated in the previous sub-section.

- At the methodological level a theoretical approach of EFP encounters a pressing need to account for its rapidly evolving structures. Two kinds of outputs can be identified and distinguished in this respect, foreign policy decisions and foreign policy integration (or structural changes). The latter is indeed an integral part of national foreign policies which accept to pool or to develop new capacities at the European level, in the field of defence or development aid for instance. It exerts moreover a direct feedback effect on EFP processes either by endowing the EU with more international capabilities (e.g. new ESDP capabilities) or by transforming already existing assets (e.g. cross-pillarisation).
At the epistemological level, the interaction between national foreign policies and EU institutions and processes raises a debate on their respective influences much in line with the traditional agent-structure debate in foreign policy analysis. The rapidly evolving structures of EFP only increase the necessity to deal with this issue. The agent-structure debate is even somehow duplicated in the European context as the EU can be seen both as an actor in itself and as a foreign policy forum for national actors. As Jorgensen puts it: the EU has a “Janus-face”, it is both an arena and an actor (2004b: 11).

At the ontological level, EFP studies have witnessed a uncommon and fruitful development of constructivist (Tonra, Jorgensen) and discursive (Waever, Larsen, Hansen) analyses, and the positivist / post-positivist debate could therefore be of particular relevance in the study of foreign policy in a European context.

These three last challenges underline the daunting task of devising a comprehensive framework in the field of EFP which to some extent amounts to shooting at a moving target. It might well be too early (Jorgensen, 2004b: 14) to try and elaborate a theoretical framework, and this in any case goes far beyond the ambition of this contribution. However two promising analytical frameworks have already been proposed which we present in the following section.

3 - Two Foreign Policy Analysis approaches to the study of foreign policy in a European context

Two main FPA approaches have been designed with the explicit aim of accounting for foreign policy in a European context (White, 2004): a model of European foreign policy decision-making by Roy H. Ginsberg and a revised FPA framework by Brain White. Both are analytical frameworks without explicit references to meta-theoretical claims, and they further call for middle range theories for complement.

(1) A European foreign policy decision-making system

Ginsberg (1999, 2001) starts from the assumption that EFP is a sui generis object requiring a specific analytical framework. Although not included in the classification devised by Tonra (2000), it would in this respect clearly fit in the sui generis / EU foreign policy category alongside for instance Bretherton and Vogler (1998). With the latter (1998: 3) he warns that “comparing and assessing EFP as if the EU were a state is a slippery slope” (2001: 12). Unlike Bretherton and Vogler however, Ginsberg takes into account the policy processes and interactions at work in the definition of the EU foreign policy in all three pillars. He therefore approaches the EU as a system rather than as an actor. His analysis relies on an Eastonian decision-making system and focus on the inputs and outputs of EFP, with a particular attention to outcomes (as opposed to outputs) and their potential feedback effect on the system.

(2) A revised FPA framework

Brian White’s revised FPA framework is based on a wider acception of EFP encompassing national foreign policies not only when they contribute to the EU foreign policy decision-making system, but also in their own right, and particularly to the extent that they are transformed through foreign policy cooperation in the European context (cf. also Jorgensen, 2004a: 35). White also considers that however specific the study of EFP requires less a sui generis framework than an adaptation of pre-existing approaches. Foreign policy in a European context constitutes in this respect a major challenge for traditional FPA approaches rather than an object that falls outside their realm. This in turn requires an adaptation of FPA traditionally centred on the dominance of State actors, governmental power and realist underpinnings. None of these three characteristics indeed seems to fit to European foreign policy patterns and processes. White shows that FPA still apply when it comes to European foreign policy provided three major modifications:
- a focus on actors rather than states (so as to include EU institutions),
- a study of governance networks rather than governmental power (to take into account the specificity of the EU political system),
- a theoretical basis drawing on post-positivist as well as positivist approaches (to take into account the discursive mechanisms and normative dynamics at work at the European level).

He then proposes a renewed FPA framework to analyse European foreign policy, focusing on its actors and the processes through which they interact, the issues on the agenda and the EU capabilities to address them, the context of the EU foreign policy and its outcomes. White’s approach entails a major revision of foreign policy analysis, and it remains to be seen whether it will find application outside the European context for which it has been explicitly designed. It must be acknowledged though that this revision is mainly an extension of traditional FPA and that it remains therefore applicable to national foreign policies provided that one accounts for the restriction of actors to states and governance networks to governmental structures in the study of non-European foreign policies. It could thereby open the way to a differentiation between foreign policies in different forms of states (Halliday, 1994).

White’s revised FPA approach provides a promising analytical framework which concentrates primarily on the actors involved in EFP decision-making rather than on its structures or outcomes (White, 1999; Carlsnaes, 2004). It can in this respect help to analyse the processes of integration and formulation of EU foreign policy, i.e. of the processes through which actors interact to determine the issues on the EU agenda. It also provides with a comprehensive framework to study how EU and national capabilities are mobilised in a given context to achieve certain outcomes, and thereby identify prominent patterns in the implementation of EFP.

4 - Foreign Policy Analysis and the theoretical challenges of EFP

White’s definition of EFP differs slightly from ours in regard to the inclusion of foreign policy integration processes and the simultaneous study of national and EU/EC foreign policies. It would therefore be helpful to confront his analytical framework and the specific challenges of EFP we have identified in section 2.

The present section elaborates on some of the key elements of a revised FPA framework (actors, processes, agenda and capabilities, context, outputs and outcomes) to “test” its adaptability and relevance to the challenges of EFP as we have defined it.

**Actors** - White’s analysis encompass national (member states) as well as supranational (EU institutions) actors in the study of the governance networks interacting in the definition of EFP. His 2001 book offers further insight on potential applications of a revised FPA framework. Sub-national actors such as national ministries are included in the study of the British foreign policy for instance, together with their take on European foreign policy decision making processes (Cabinet Office, FCO, other Ministries). We would also add an emphasis on other (non-national) sub-unit actors such as the Commission DGs and certain Council bodies (Working Groups, Council Secretariat, EU Headquarters, Policy Unit).

**Processes** - White underlines the fact that the nature of the different policy processes largely depends on the respective legal basis of Union foreign policy or Community Foreign policy. He also warns however that one cannot rely on a simple intergovernmental / Community divide (1999: 49-50). Two main reasons may account for the need indeed to go beyond this dualism. First, the legal bases of EFP derive from a set of different texts (including EC/EU Treaties as well as external agreements for that matter) and do not follow a strict dual structure. As Bretherton and Vogler put it, “issue areas are not
coterminus with policy domains [and] even in matters of external trade [for instance] there are anomalous or contested issue areas.” (1998:3). This should not prevent us however, as the authors conclude, that a policy process approach is not appropriate, but that one should refine its analytical framework. Secondly, processes and (legal) procedures are not coextensive, and one should also pay attention to the socialisation processes at work at both bilateral and European levels. Foreign policy cooperation is also implemented through informal exchanges of information, the launch of joint initiatives and the habit of diplomats working together almost daily in the Brussels-based working Groups of the Council.

**Agenda and capabilities -** The European foreign policy agenda includes a wide variety of objects falling in the scope of EFP such as strategic priorities (Common Strategies, European Security Strategy) and reactions to international context especially in times of crises. The integration dimension of EFP also calls for the inclusion of the planned or potential evolutions of capabilities at the EU and national levels, whether it be further integration (Helsinki Headlines Goals, European Capabilities Action Plan), possible devolution (such as the French and British recurrent threats to re-nationalise development aid). These elements belong to the EFP agenda in the sense that they constitute integral parts of the policies concerned (e.g. development cooperation or ESDP). Capabilities should also explicitly include both EU and national instruments: a policy formulated at the European level will sometimes be implemented at the national one (e.g. a *démarche* by the Presidency or another national embassy if the Presidency is not represented in the country, a vote at the UN Security Council).

**Context -** The context in which EFP is formulated and implemented is the second structural element in White’s otherwise agent-centred FPA framework. It encompasses both internal and external elements (Carlsnaes, 2002). Among the former, European-based non-state actors such as private lobbies and coalitions of NGOs also play a role in the definition of EFP which is sometimes even formalised in consultation processes (NGOs are for instance explicitly included as partners in the EU-ACP Cotonou agreements). Among the latter, external actors (most notably the US) and organisations (such as the UN or NATO) are important structural factors to take into account in studying EFP formulation and implementation even when not directly involved in the issue.

**Outputs and outcomes -** Three kinds of outputs of the EFP decision-making system at the EU level can be distinguished once a common position has been formulated:

- the EU a *clearing house* (exchange of information between the member states and the Commission to know who is doing what),
- the EU as a *coordination mechanism* (often in responding to a crisis - this goes beyond the clearing house as Brussels-based institutions),
- the EU as an *actor* per se (joint action).

A fourth kind of output is the integration of foreign policy instruments as with the current creation of multinational Battle Groups. This last output concerns directly the building-up or becoming-an-actor dimension of the EU. The distinction with agenda and outputs (or decisions) is also helpful in that it allows for a consideration of the potential lack of EFP output. Iraq for instance has been on the European agenda almost throughout the 2002-2003 crisis even though no significant output has been perceptible until October 2004 when the EU eventually agreed on a financial support to the elections and a civilian capacities training program. A further elaboration on outputs could eventually include foreign policy *outcomes,* i.e. the impact of EFP on its context and its potential feedback influence European foreign policy decision-making (Ginsberg, 1999: 447-8, 2001; Jorgensen, 2004).

We can draw from this brief elaboration three provisional conclusions on the adaptability of FPA to the specific challenges of EFP.

- At the methodological level, White’s revised FPA approach does not choose between processes and outputs even though the emphasis seems to be on the former. It could also easily add additional and explicit focus on the integration dynamics at work within EFP.
- At the epistemological level, it clearly favours an agent-based focus (White, 1999; Carlsnaes 2004). However it also takes into consideration the *processes* and *context* of EFP as quasi-structural elements. Here again a revised FPA framework refuses to choose between the two
alternatives and tries to embrace both, but with a different emphasis. The agent-structure
duality can still easily stir compatibility issues when it comes to identifying independent and
dependent variables in the study of EFP.

- Finally at the ontological (or meta-theoretical) level, White’s analytical framework does
clearly not take side in the positivist / post-positivist debate, and calls rather for an eclectic
approach incorporating complementary middle-range theories from all sides.

5 - Discourse analysis and Foreign Policy Analysis

Our objective in the last three sections of this paper is to answer White’s call for an eclectic approach.
We do so by assessing the added value of discourse analysis approaches for an FPA analysis of
foreign policy in a European context, and elaborating on the theoretical conditions of possibility for
such an encounter.

To try and introduce discourse analysis in an FPA framework raises indeed issues of consistency at the
meta-theoretical level, mostly along the lines of the positivist / post-positivist debate (Carlsnaes,
2002). Given the often structural nature of discursive approaches to foreign policy, it also revives the
agent-structure debate at an epistemological level.

While we do not pretend to offer a solution, we will keep addressing these issues recurrently in the
next three sections. We briefly begin this section by defining what we call discourse analysis. We will
then present its main structural applications in foreign policy analysis before assessing its main
advantages and shortcomings for foreign policy analysis.

Discourse analysis: some conceptual clarifications and theoretical features

While strongly rooted in a post-positivist approach, discourse analysis is therefore difficult to localize.
As Milliken puts is: “Discourse theoretizing crosses over and mixes divisions between post-
structuralists, post-modernists and some feminists and social constructivists.” (1999: 225). A
theoretical clarification is however possible to try and identify the theoretical underpinnings of
discourse-centred approaches. The most important is probably the distinction between constructivism
and post-structuralism which is often drawn at the expense of the latter (Adler, 1997, 2002). Waever in
reaction rejects the constructivist material/ideational divide and affirms the material character of
discursive structures (2001: 22). Discursive analysis does therefore not amount to a rejection of the
reality of the world out there, but on its interpretation and constitution through systems of
significations to which we will return later.

Discourse, or “discursive formations” as Foucault puts it, are not to be mistaken for political or daily
speeches. They are discursive patterns highlighting the conditions of possibilities enabling and
constraining at the same time particular statements. Discourse analysis concentrates on an analysis of
the meaning of particular concepts which structure and articulate what the actors can say. It keeps
therefore a strong emphasis on the structural determination of actors’ positions and preferences and
hence belongs to a specific structuralist trend in post-reflectivist approaches (Hansen, 2001: 4-5).

It would certainly be helpful to try to localize discourse analysis in the three theoretical levels we have
identified in the first section of this paper, i.e. whether it constitutes an analytical or a theoretical
framework. It might however be too early to answer such a question as Waever acknowledges:
discursive approaches can be seen as either a methodology […] or as a theoretical approach” (2004:
198). As an analytical framework, FPA is explicitly dedicated to theoretical eclecticism and particularly
opened to both positivist and post-positivist theories (White, 1999: 56). Therefore the compatibility
between FPA and discourse analysis remains in question: to what extent can the latter be considered a
middle range theory or a methodology and fit within the scope of an FPA framework? We will return
to this issue with a broader perspective on discourse analysis approaches including speech act theory at the end of section 6.

**Discursive structures and the formulation of foreign policy**

The core “theoretical commitments” of discourse studies in international relations have been formulated by Milliken (1999) as a three-fold research programme. First discourses constitute systems of representations which must be analysed empirically with an emphasis on the relationships between different concepts in a system of signification (e.g. binary oppositions). Discourse also produces the subjects and objects it makes intelligible, and exclude others as irrelevant. More specifically discourse productivity defines the subjects authorised to speak and to act, the audiences for these authorised actors and the common sense binding speakers and audiences. Finally discourses evolve within an indeterminate play of practice where discursive formations compete to achieve and maintain their hegemony.

Several researches have begun to draw on this organization of discourse analysis to structure their empirical analyses. In the filed of European foreign policy, Henrik Larsen has provided a groundbreaking study of French and British foreign policies towards European integration in the 1980s (1997). His main hypothesis is that national discursive frameworks can be identified in both countries that operate as systems of meanings (or signification) and frame the alternatives tracks their respective governments can choose in regard to European integration. He studies how these systems of signification articulate the four concepts of the nation/state, Europe, security and the nature of international relations. Larsen later directly referred to Milliken in a further research on the discursive structures framing foreign policy options at the European level (2004).

Others have followed the same path among which the study of the foreign policies of Nordic countries towards European integration edited by Lene Hansen (2001). In this latter book, Ole Waever elaborates on discourse analysis as a theoretical framework for foreign policy analysis combining methodological, epistemological and ontological elements and positions. This approach slightly differs from that of Larsen and is not in principle limited to the study of Europe debates or to European foreign policies. Waever shares with Larsen the view that a discourse analysis of foreign policy should be viewed as complementary to other approaches (2001: 26, 28). He suggests modifications to the approach designed by the latter by relying on the introduction of different layers within national discursive formations and on the reference within them to potential contestations, changes and rearticulations. Discursive formations are constituted by constellations of concepts (nation, state and Europe) selected on the basis of a strictly defined research agenda (Nordic foreign policies toward European integration in the 1990s). These constellations are distributed along three layers: the basic conceptual relation between nation and state, the relational position of state/nation constellations vis-à-vis Europe and the concrete policies adopted for Europe. Discursive formations can be reproduced and modified at all three levels even though change is less likely to occur as one reaches “deeper” layers of constellations.

These two discourse analysis approaches have in common a focus on the systems of signification which shape the policy options available to foreign policy decision-makers at the national and to a lesser extent European levels. They propose interesting insights in the structural linguistic frameworks which enable and constraint the conduct and formulation of foreign policy which arguably no study in the beliefs or cognitive dispositions of the actors could bring with comparable accuracy and reliability.

**Structural discourse analysis and competing approaches**

A discourse analysis perspective holds arguably two main advantages on competing approaches in foreign policy analysis such as neo-liberalism, mainstream social constructivism or cognitive approaches. These advantages concern the definition and importance of ideas and the necessary distance to the discourses of actors.

The study of ideas has been famously reintroduced in the field of international relations and more precisely foreign policy in Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change by Robert O. Keohane and Judith Goldstein. This approach is based on a definition of ideas as beliefs
held by individuals, and holds that ideas do not only serve as epiphenomenal justifications, but that they can exert alongside interests a causal influence on foreign policies (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993: ch.1). They also criticise reflectivist (constructivist) approaches for failing to support the importance they grant to the study of belief by concrete and testable hypotheses. Discourse analysis seems well equipped as an analytical framework to face this shortcoming, and some studies have tested their hypotheses against alternative explanations (Larsen 1997: ch.5).

Discourse analysis approaches seem to elude important methodological issues raised by a focus on ideas and values as the latter heavily rely on the actors themselves and their discourse. Discourse is a key source of information, yet a source which needs to be analysed in itself rather than being taken for granted. Analysing discourse for its own sake rather than as an indicator for the perception and thoughts of particular actors indeed eschews a methodological difficulty faced by both studies of ideas understood as beliefs and cognitive approaches, that of empirical verification (Waever, 2004: 199). It further risks confusing what Jorgensen (2004) termed the "concepts of practice" (found in institutional discourses) and "concepts in theory" (elaborated through academic study).

The two discourse analysis approaches we have presented in the previous sub-section however share with other constructivist approaches an emphasis on continuity and offer little explanations as for how and when changes occur. The layers identified by Waever in this respect only account for the possibility of change, but gives little clue as to why actors “acted linguistically to change discursive structures when they needed to” (2001: 41). The origin of linguistic change is located outside the language, either in the changing internal power positions of the speakers or in a transformation of the international or European contexts. Language here is no longer considered as an independent variable, whereas it was still floating freely in Larsen (1997). How does an external change translate in a rearticulation of the discursive constellations? The emphasis of such "structural" discourse analysis on systems of signification seems to limit their explanatory power at the expense of an analysis of the plays of practice sketched by Milliken.

6 - Speech act theory and foreign policy analysis in a European context

The failure of structural discourse analysis to account for change, which it shares with some other constructivist approaches, is all the more surprising as some of the social theorists to which it refers have precisely worked in this explicit objective (Fairclough, 1992). In his presentation of discourse analysis approaches to European integration, Thomas Diez (1999) could hold the key to this paradox as he points to a particular source of inspiration in social theory of discourse, namely the work of John Austin (1962) and the theory of speech acts.

Speech acts are not newcomers in the field of IR, especially in the field of security studies, but they have been little used in foreign policy. Moreover theoretical investigations have been rare up to now and references are generally limited to Austin while other contributions are left unexploited (Searle, Bourdieu, Butler). Similarly speech acts are usually referred to a few archetypal examples (“I pronounce you man and wife”, “I apologize”, “I thereby bequeath to my cousin”) which obviously sheds little light on their potential use in political sciences.

We present the current debates on speech act theory in the broader discipline of IR and delineate its potential contribution to structural discourse approaches and foreign policy analysis.

Theoretical debates within the speech act theory

The speech act theory dates originates in the so-called “linguistic turn” in Western philosophy in the first part of the twentieth century, and heavily relies on the work of philosophers such as Wittgenstein and to a lesser extent Heidegger. Much speech act analyses in social sciences today draw on the work of John L. Austin, a student of Wittgenstein at the University of Cambridge, and more particularly on
his seminal series of conferences at Harvard in 1955. There he establishes a distinction between constative and performative utterances, the latter having the particularity to constitute an act in itself as in naming a ship, making a bet, apologizing (1962: lect.I). He then differentiates between different forms of performatives, and in particular illocutionary acts (to act by simply saying some words, as in “I apologize” or “I declare the session closed”) and perlocutionary acts (to act by saying something that convinces, deters or scares) (1962: lect. VIII). Austin’s analysis focuses on the performance of illocutionary acts since perlocutionary acts have long been studied in the field of rhetorics. An illocutionary acts is neither true nor false, but it can be happy or not in the sense that the performance of the act depends on conditions of satisfaction.

John Searle who studied with Austin in Oxford developed a speech act theory within a broader study on the structure of the social universe and the role of language in institutionalising reality (1999: ch.5). Performatives contribute to the reproduction of institutional reality by actualising the “collective assignment of status function and above all their continued recognition and acceptance over long periods of time [which] can create and maintain a reality of governments, money, nation-states” (1999: 131). Searle also points to the fact that speech acts can also directly create social reality as in “saying in the right context ‘War is declared’ […] is creating the institutional fact that a state of war exists between the two countries.” (1999: 133). He thereby described a particular type of illocutionary acts (“declarations”) that can “bring about a change in the world by representing it as having been changed” (1999: 150) and which are generally dependent on the existence of extralinguistic institutions.

The link Searle has drawn between the linguistic analysis of speech acts (eg. an order) and “extralinguistic institutions (eg. a police uniform) have opened the way a much wider use of speech acts in social theory. The main condition of satisfaction of a speech act creating a state of affairs is partly based on the collective intentionality it manages to produce. Pierre Bourdieu (1982) has extensively elaborated on this social conditionality by criticising Austin’s exclusive focus on linguistic framework for analysis. To him the force of the illocutionary act is to be found primarily in their institutional environment rather than in a discursive process (1982: 25, 68-73, 105-13). Authority mainly comes from outside the language. In line with Judith Butler’s later writings (1997), Bourdieu however also acknowledged a certain autonomy of the language from its social conditions of felicity. It sometimes happen that someone originally deprived of significant authority gains power through discursive rupture, as in the case of heretical subversion. Language therefore allows in critical circumstances to overthrow established authority to establish a new one. Such performatives can in exceptional circumstances bring about changes by recurrently enunciating them (1982: 150-2)

Speech acts, discourse analysis and the challenges of foreign policy analysis in a European context

This long way around linguistic and social theory was meant to identify precisely the processes and explanatory power of the speech act theory in social and political sciences, including international relations and foreign policy analysis. These debates have been mirrored in the field of security studies between Didier Bigo and Ole Waever (Waever, 1998; Bigo, 1998, 2005: 133-4). They revolve around the appropriate focus for research, whether it should be the speaker and his discourse or his social position within a field where he is in competition with other speakers with different interests. In the first case, the emphasis remains on the linguistic force with which a securitising actor is able (or not) to convince his audience of the existence of a threat. It is thereby inclined to grant more autonomy to performative utterances in the transformations of common perceptions. The view defended by Bigo is more in line with the position of Bourdieu which localises authority primarily outside the realm of language. He therefore calls for a sociological study of the relative positions of the actors in the field of security. Securitising actors compete in the definition of the threats because each of them seeks to maintain and increase their power (and public fundings).

These debates moreover shed a new light on the contribution of speech act theory to (1) discourse theory and (2) foreign policy analysis.

(1) First the two branches of discourse analysis we have identified, namely structural discourse analysis and speech act theory, seem compatible and mutually reinforcing. The distinction between
different layers in the discursive structures of a political arena leave room for the possibility of change at all levels, even though it is more probable at the superficial one. Speech act practices allow the actors to compete among themselves and take advantages of particular contexts to build up momentum for change.

(2) We are now in a position to assess the theoretical contribution of discourse analysis as a whole to FPA approaches to European foreign policy. Of particular interest is how they confront the challenges of EFP study outlined in section 2:

- At the methodological level, structural discourse analysis focuses on outputs and helps to explain why particular foreign policy options have been chosen at the exclusion of others. National and European discursive constellations indeed frame the political positions available to foreign policy actors. Speech act analyses provide interesting insights in the interplay between European foreign policy actors, their strategic interests and their socialisation at the European level. This arguably helps to account for the rapid evolutions in the formulation and integration of foreign policies in a European context.

- At the epistemological level, their respective focuses on agents (speech act theory) and structures (structural discourse analysis) only reproduce the agent-structure problematique already encountered in FPA approaches. Innovative thinking is here required in the line of the synthesis proposed by Carlsnaes (2002) or the linguistic structuration hypothesis of Diez (1999).

- At the ontological level, an analytical framework approach such as White’s revised FPA approach allows for the use of discourse analysis even if grounded on post-positivism. Their compatibility would become an issue only if and when a positivist framework is added. The uncertain status of discourse analysis (Waever, 2004) however makes it hard to draw any conclusion at this level.

###

7 - Speech act analyses in the study of European foreign and security policy

The objective of this last section is to provide a few concrete insights on the added value of speech act approaches to the study of European foreign policy. While the speech act theory has been extensively applied to security studies lately, little has been done paradoxically to introduce it in the field of foreign policy. We introduce here two analytical frameworks either specifically designed for the study of EFP or increasingly applied to it, to point out to some possible applications.

(1) Speech act processes in the integration and formulation of European foreign policies: securitisation processes in European foreign and security policy

The “securitisation” approach (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998) claims that the scope and content of security threats cannot be analysed objectively but that they depend on a particular discursive mechanism. A political actor addresses an audience about a lethal threat to a referent object (most often the survival of the State or the nation, and claims that ordinary rules need to be breached to grant him exceptional powers to prevent the threat and restore security. Such a securitising move is successful if the audience is convinced of the existence of the threat and accepts that such exceptional

---

3 This is all the more surprising as some researchers have prominently invested both fields. Waever only points out to future promising developments in the speech act theory on foreign policy in one of his latest articles (2004: 212).
measures be taken if only on a temporary basis. It should be noted however that securitisation speech acts seem to function as perlocutionary performatives before they manage to establish the social reality of a threat and then become illocutionary. As Buzan, Waever and de Wilde put it: “Since securitisation can never be only imposer, there is some need to argue one’s case” (1998: 25)

This framework arguably offers a fruitful tool to analyse the interplay between EU member States and institutions through the differences in and the role played by their discourses. Normative references to both humanitarian imperatives and security interests have indeed legitimised and fostered the reinforcement of European foreign and security capacities throughout the 1990s. Specific attention should in this respect be paid to the “speech act” processes in the formulation of European foreign policy, as has been done in the case of immigration policies (Huysmans, 2000) and the fifth enlargement (Higashino, 2004).

The increasing involvement of the EU in African conflicts provides another if slightly different instance where discursive mechanisms similar to a “securitisation” process have been widely used. References to the necessity to prevent massacres and eventually to avoid a repetition of the Rwandan tragedy have helped legitimising the creation of new instruments (ESDP) and the transformation of older EU policies such as development cooperation. The main difference with a securitisation process as Buzan, Waever and de Wilde have defined it is that the audience of the speech act and the group threatened (the referent object) are not the same group of people. In the case of what we would term “humanitarian securitisation”, a speaker addresses an audience to convince them that the survival of another group (African civilians) is at stake and that they should allow him to override the normal rules and take exceptional measures to stop the massacre.

This humanitarian discourse has helped breaking new grounds in the development of EU foreign and security policy, by overriding existing rules and establishing new ones in reference to a humanitarian imperative. Within a few years only, the EU foreign and security policy has undergone sweeping changes which can hardly be accounted for when one tries to assess EU or member states economic and security interests in sub-Saharan Africa. Structural discourse analysis do not fare better which only acknowledge a discursive change from a civilian power to a “full instrumental power” discourse but gives no clue as to how the change has come about (Larsen, 2004). Humanitarian securitisation discourses have recurrently been used for instance to legitimise the breaking of many implicit rules which were limiting the EU involvement in African security:

- The civilian nature of EU integration has been abandoned with the integration of the first concrete defence component in the Treaty (the humanitarian “Petersberg tasks” in the Amsterdam treaty, although not directly related to Africa).
- The understanding that NATO held a right of first refusal was breached with the launch of operation Artemis in 2003. Even though autonomous operations had been formally envisaged since the Saint Malo agreement, it was arguably a concession made by Atlanticist member states with the implicit view that this would not happen but in the long-term.
- The regional scope of potential EU military operations has been extended beyond the Balkans, despite strong initial opposition from some member states.
- The Conservative argument that ESDP amounted to a loss of sovereignty (and the creation of a “European army”) was overridden by the UK Labour government when it proposed the concept of Battle Groups originally called “Battle groups for Africa”. The African destination of the EU Battle groups was repeated by Tony Blair in his domestic media campaign on Africa in November 2004.
- The necessity of an existing legal basis for EU activities was almost silently breached to allow the Council headquarters the first steps of the EU in the field of military cooperation (planning support for the AU deployment in Darfur without any legal basis).
- An exception has been made to the usual allocation of development aid to ODA activities to fund the military deployments of the African Union in Burundi, Darfur, and soon in Somalia and Congo DRC. Here the speech act articulated a “security as a prerequisite for development” discourse has served to legitimise a revolution in the practice of EU development cooperation which has been institutionalised in an EU-ACP agreement on a Peace Facility for Africa.
These speech acts concern both the national and the European levels and therefore manage to study EFP as the whole constituted of national, EU and EC foreign policies. Even though its scope and ambition are much narrower than those of “securitisation”, the concept of “humanitarian securitisation” therefore proves an interesting tool to analyse the first developments of ESDP and the incremental use of development cooperation for security-related activities.

Further research in this field would analyse a set of EU foreign policy statements on crisis management in Africa and identify in each case the actors who have promoted these changes (mostly France, Britain and Belgium) as well as those who have tried to oppose them (neutral member states, officials within the Commission). It should also try and point to the “conditions of satisfaction” of these speech acts (evolution of the international context, particular crises) to account for instance for the failure of French leaders to convince the EU to take part in Operation Turquoise in Rwanda in 1994 (de La Guérivière, 1996). Lastly attention could be paid to the securitisation discourses on terrorism and immigration from Africa which have recently emerged in European fora, and to their potential impact on European foreign policies.

(2) Speech act approaches to the implementation of European foreign and security policies: the case of conflict prevention

The second framework has been recently designed by Albert, Diez and Stetter (2004) to analyse the impact of European foreign policy on internal and international conflicts according to the level of violence legitimised by securitisation discourses. The involvement of the EU in conflict prevention is often manifold and of a cross-pillar nature. National, EC and EU foreign policies and the international context in which conflicts take place further complicated case studies. The EU does not mobilise the same tools at the same time, depending on the intensity of the conflict, its history, its geographical location and the relations of the conflict parties to the EU and its member states.

This framework refers to a wide understanding of the concept of conflict, which is not limited to physical violence but also encompasses latent conflicts where incompatible interests or identities confront each other and already threaten to lead to a political argument and eventually an outbreak of violence. “Conflict” is therefore defined as an incompatibility of subject positions, whatever its concrete manifestation. “Conflict” is not deemed bad per se, but only when it triggers mechanisms of identity exclusion and violence. The framework assumes that interests and identities are the outcomes of discursive practices and securitisation processes which can fuel conflicts (Buzan, de Wilde, Waever: 1998). Conflicting interests and identities are therefore the product of discursive mechanisms (or speech acts) whereby a particular speaker addresses an audience to convince them of the reality of an existential threat, of the existence of an enemy.

Such an understanding of conflicts allows for a new and wider approach to conflict prevention and conflict resolution. Both aim at reducing discursive and physical violence to lower intensity, where normal political rules are considered enough to handle the issue. Such interventions can be primarily directed at the political (and military) leaders, or address a wider range of social actors, including civil society. They can also take two different forms whether these approaches are direct and discrete initiatives or structural and more diffuse incentives. This helps to identify four different paths through which an actor can help de-escalating a conflict. These are summarised in the table 1.
### Approach adopted by the EU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Structural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) compulsory impact</td>
<td>(2) enabling impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) connective impact</td>
<td>(4) constructive impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Direction of incentive vis-à-vis conflict parties**
- **primarily political leadership**
- **principally wider societal level**

Table 1: Pathways of EU impact (adapted from Albert Diez and Stetter, 2004)

A *compulsory impact* relates to the direct incentives an actor can address to political and military leaders engaged in a conflict. The suspension of development aid (as a negative incentive) or the offer of membership (as a positive incentive) constitute two tangible ways through which the EU can exert a direct influence on conflicting parties. An *enabling impact* occurs when the EU supports an institutional and discursive framework favouring de-securitising moves by local leaders. The offer of a new discursive register, most often articulated on the idea of “peace and integration” is a diffuse incentive for local actors to give up exclusionary discourses and promote cooperation and integration among former enemies. Such a socialisation of political leaders is most obvious in the case of association agreements where there is a perspective of European accession. The EU can also influence a conflict by addressing a wider societal audience. It can in this respect either directly support civil society actors promoting peace and reconciliation at the grassroots level (*connective impact*), or indirectly put in place new discursive frameworks in which identities are being constructed through peaceful communication rather than conflicting patterns (*constructive impact*). While the EU is slowly developing its connective impact in external conflicts, including in sub-Saharan Africa, its constructive impact is only perceptible within its borders, as the Franco-German conflict or the situation in Northern Ireland show.

### Conclusion

This paper had two main objectives. It has first built an enlarged definition of European foreign policy encompassing foreign policies at the national and European levels and how they related to each other, and sketch the theoretical challenges facing foreign policy analysis in this context.

It has also assessed the added value of discourse analysis approaches for the revised FPA framework designed by Brain White (1999, 2001). Discourse analysis approaches have then been differentiated between a dominant structural analysis (Larsen, 1997, 2004; Waever, 2001, 2004) and speech act approaches (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998; Albert, Diez and Stetter, 2004). These two approaches provide interesting and complementary tools for an analysis of the patterns and processes of European foreign policy. Patterns and processes need to be analysed jointly if one is to develop comprehensive foreign policy analyses connecting agent-based and structural factors.

The openness of White’s revised FPA framework allows it to include insights from discourse analysis approaches and widen its explanatory capacities. However the possibility to combine both structural and agent-based explanations remains in question and additional perspectives from structural discourse analysis and speech act theory can only reproduce the same problematique without offering
a solution. The framework proposed by Carlsnaes (2002) and the idea of linguistic structuration (Diez, 1999) could offer promising hypotheses for a challenge which directly derives from our definition of the field of European foreign policy.

Bibliography


