Struggling over meanings: Discourses on the EU's international presence

Caterina Carta and Jean-Frédéric Morin

Abstract

The first section of this article arranges the four theoretical approaches and methods presented in the special issues – namely interpretative constructivism, post-structuralism, discursive institutionalism and critical discourse analysis – along two dimensions: (a) the role of discourse in the constitution of the world, depending on whether approaches perceive social structure as being constitutive of or constituted by discourse; and (b) interpretation of the weight of material and ideational elements in discourses. This model helps to make sense of the profound theoretical diversity that characterises analytical approaches to international relations discourse. The second section tackles the question of 'who does the speaking'. It identifies the different voices that converge in the EU's international choir and problematises the discursive environment that forges international discourses through the theoretical lenses of selected approaches. In the last section, the contributions to this special issue are presented.

Keywords

Discourse analysis, EU foreign policy, theoretical diversity

Introduction: what do discourses reveal about the international role of the EU?

For over 50 years, the process of European integration has profoundly shaped an imagined sense of belonging to a European community. Despite difficulties in establishing what exactly a European Union (EU) identity is supposed to be, the process of European integration assumed the Aesopian motto 'United we stand, divided we fall'. Recent events conveyed the impression that European integration is not to be taken for granted. Waves of enlargement, institutional reforms, social and political unrest, and economic and financial instability, both in Europe and in its immediate neighbourhood, have profoundly challenged the meaning and course of the European integration process.

Corresponding author:
Caterina Carta, Vesalius College (VUB), Pleinlaan 5, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium.
Email: ccarta@vub.ac.be

In a speech delivered more than 20 years ago, Margaret Thatcher laconically posited: 'such a body [a European Community of 30 nations] … is an even more utopian enterprise than the Tower of Babel. For at least the builders of Babel all spoke the same language when they began' (Thatcher, 1992). This comment still evokes some topical concerns about the process of European integration. Beyond linguistic diversity, do European member states and EU institutions share the same references when contributing to the articulations of the EU international discourse? Whose discourse is the one finally agreed upon? To what extent are different discourses compatible with each other? And, how can this diversity be translated into foreign policy practices?

This special issue looks at these questions through the lens of discourse analysis as applied to the field of international relations (IR). Depending on one's theoretical lenses, discourses can be conceived as exercising framing, generative, performative and coordinative functions. First, discourses frame and structure what can be conceived and uttered (Hajer, 1993). The process whereby a signified can be attributed to a signifier entails the articulation of this signifier into a broader semantic system of meanings (Derrida, 1976). Second, discourses generate and construct the meaning of what exists in such a way that nothing exists if it cannot be thought through and transposed into language (Wittgenstein, 1971). Third, discourses have a performative power (Austin, 1962). Rhetorical strategies inherent in discourses contribute to the way social facts are perceived (Foucault, 1969 [2011]), by establishing semantic connections among phenomena. Therefore, discourses shape an individual's perception of reality (Wæver, 1995). Fourth, the process of creating discourse is inherently interactive and intersubjective (Habermas, 1984). In this regard, discourses are semantic fields in which social interactions are produced.

This special issue bears testimony to the plurality of theoretical approaches and methods within the remit of discourse analysis. Different theoretical perspectives understand differently both the formative range of discourse and the functions that discourse analysis, as a set of cognate methods, can perform. The very object of analysis of the special issue is itself contested. EU foreign policy is characteristically fragmented, and its meaning disputed. Different national and institutional actors converge in the making of international discourses. If EU foreign policy is defined as the 'sum of official external relations conducted by [an] independent actor[s]' (Hill, 2003: 3), it will soon be realised that the number of independent national and institutional actors that form the EU voice account for an inherently pluralistic choir. Discourse analysis can be of great use in illuminating the way in which social discursive practices convey meaning to foreign policy discourses, through both contestation and communicative action.

The underlying objective of this special issue is two-fold: to shed light on the versatility of discourse analysis toolkits, and to link this with an empirical investigation of the EU's international discourse. In *substantive* terms, this issue celebrates academic diversity as it gathers contributions from different theoretical and analytical schools. In *analytical* terms, it aims to contribute to advancements in the study of EU foreign policy discourse. The EU has been conceptualised as a 'difference engine' in which internal processes of construction and representation converge in its international identity (Manners and Whitman, 2003: 380–381): the ways in which EU actors articulate

discourses in order to frame an international position is the main topic of this collective enquiry, as it is asked whether there is anything specific about the EU's international discourse-making.

The first section of this introduction arranges the four theoretical approaches and methods presented in the special issues – namely interpretative constructivism, post-structuralism, discursive institutionalism (DI) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) – along two dimensions: (a) the role of discourse in the constitution of the world, depending on whether approaches perceive social structure as being constitutive of or constituted by discourse; and (b) interpretation of the weight of material and ideational elements in discourses. This model helps to make sense of the profound theoretical diversity that characterises analytical approaches to IR discourse. The second section tackles the question of 'who does the speaking'. It identifies the different voices that converge in the EU's international choir, and problematises the discursive environment that forges international discourses through the theoretical lenses of selected approaches. In the last section, the contributions to this special issue are presented.

Discourse analysis and theoretical diversity

Although discourse analysis has been defined as 'an emerging research program, engaging a community of scholars' (Milliken, 1999: 226), the term discourse is widely contested. Different conceptions range from narrow interpretations which clarify that 'in linguistics, [a discourse is] a stretch of language, larger than the sentence' (Bullock and Stallybrass, 1977: 175 in Gasper and Apthorpe, 1996: 3), to broad ones that assume that 'there is nothing outside discourse' (Campbell, 2005: 4). Linguistic traditions of discourse analysis draw on the distinction between text and discourse (Wodak, 2008: 6), or '"small d" and "big D" discourses' (Gee, 2007: 26). Broad interpretations extend the focus to 'the role of more macro linguistic and social structures in framing our social and psychological life' (Burr, 2003: 20). Discourse analysis as applied to IR generally focuses on 'big D discourses', with a varying emphasis on the study of texts.

As mentioned, diversity not only concerns the object of this study (e.g. the community of actors who concur to define the EU's international discourse and the nature and functions of discursive patterns connected with foreign policy), but also the interpretative lenses adopted. On the one hand, IR can be conceived as a dividing discipline (Holsti, 1985), cut across by endless and unsolved debates over the *incommensurable* (Kristensen, 2012: 32). On the other, discourse analysis is characterised by a plurality of disciplinary, theoretical and methodological approaches marked by internal heterogeneity, in such a way that 'it is perfectly possible to have two books in discourse analysis with no overlap in content at all' (cf. MacDonnel, 1986; Stubb, 1983, in Potter and Wetherell, 1987 [1996]: 6). This internal heterogeneity makes it extremely difficult to synthesise the different approaches presented here. As a cautionary note, it should therefore be clarified that when referring to determined approaches or authors, the references quoted in this article are exclusively borne in mind.

Despite these observations, it is possible to identify some common ground between the discursive approaches presented in this volume. In general, analytical discourse

approaches to IR tend to have positivist approaches as a polemical target. The latter generally claim that it is possible to individuate 'law or law-like regularities' that consent to infer and order patterns of human behaviour and social life (Sil and Katzenstein, 2010: 416). Social constructivism, post-structuralism, DI and CDA approaches, in their differing variants and to different extents, tend to criticise the positivist 'separation of subject and object and the search for clear cause-effect relationship[s]' (Bieler and Morton, 2008: 104). Hence, these theoretical approaches view 'as isomorphic the seer and the seen, the knower and the known' (Ryan, 1970, in Manning, 1979: 660). In this sense – with the limits that inform all generalisations – they tend to walk along an interpretative turn in social science, in that they posit that 'both the object of investigation – the web of language, symbols, institutions that constitute signification – and the tools by which investigation is carried out share inescapably the same pervasive context that is the human world' (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1988: 5–6). Therefore, what can be accessed are the different *representations* of the world, constructed by perceptions, thoughts and language.

To grasp the diversity of IR theoretical approaches and their methodologies, Sil suggests that one should focus on two '*fundamental problems* that have plagued social science disciplines since their inception' (2000: 354). These are the relationships between ideas and material components of social action, and between structure and agency. The former recalls the long-lasting theoretical diatribe between rational-choice and sociologically inspired theorists. These two camps contend on the question of what factors guide and inform both human motivations and social interactions, whether material and interest-based, or ideational and normative. The relationship between agency and structure raises a significant question: 'does the *ontological* primacy of the individual actors also accord them *epistemological* primacy vis-a-vis the structures that constrain, or give meaning to their action?' (Sil, 2000: 354).

If this framework is applied to the field of discourse analysis, the model should be slightly modified. In discourse analysis terms, a preliminary step is to understand what social structures consist of and how they can be accessed. In other words, does the social structure constitute discourses, or do agents' discourses constitute the social structure? While not denying that there is a world out there, different theoretical approaches can be located along a continuum, depending on whether they conceive (a) discourse as heavily reproducing (and thereby constituted by) real and structural dynamics; or (b) discourse as the only point of access to the real world and, accordingly, as *constitutive* of reality as we know it (in Diez's terms, as replicated in agency).[1] Jørgensen and Phillips (2002: 20, ff.) attempted to delineate such a continuum by including as a crucial point of reference Althusser, Gramsci and Foucault. With the addition of Habermas,[2] the centrality of these authors descends from two important common features of discourse-analysis approaches: their critical stance and their continuous oscillation between Kant's idealism and Marx's historical materialism (for a review, see Held, 1980: 16).

Althusser applied and expanded Marx's approach on ideology. Ideology is conceived here as a '*bricolage imaginaire*', drawing on the abstract projection and reproduction of concrete and material historical dynamics (1976: 176). He conceptualised the State as being composed of repressive and ideological apparatuses which aim to *subsume* and *reproduce* the dominant ideology as shaped by relations of production.

Through ideology, material and structural forces establish 'imagined relations' which turn concrete individuals into abstract categories due to a '*représentation du monde déterminée*' (1976: 180). In this framework, individuals are visible only insofar as they are *interpellated.* Interpellation reduces agents to mere puppets of superimposed structural logics. Paraphrasing Berger and Luckmann, the structure is, therefore, able not only to dominate the *appearance*, but also the *content* of actors' ideation (1966 [1991]: 21). Ideational components are hereby mere reproductions of material relationships; or in Althusser's theorisation, 'material displacements' of an external or internal (i.e. consciousness) verbal discourse.

Althusser's approach has been criticised on the grounds of its structural determinism and portrayal of agents' inability to determine their beliefs and actions. Moving away from Althusser's concept of interpellation, a less deterministic relationship can be established between both ideas and interests and between agency and structure. This move allows (a) agents to be brought back into the analysis and (b) the more decisive integration of the ideational dimension of material factors by analysing the reification and objectification of social processes.

Starting from Marx's assumption that capitalist society constitutes the core structure that shapes all social phenomena, Gramsci contests Marx's implicit assumption that capitalism is just a system of production. Accordingly, Gramsci refers to the term 'language', rather than discourse, to depict 'a multiplicity of facts more or less organically coherent and co-ordinated' (1929 [1999]: 347). Hegemony is contented and finally conquered through the interaction of diversified and internally heterogeneous societal forces. Hegemony, in this light, represents a balance between political and civil society (Gramsci, 1931 [1953]); it is a multidimensional phenomenon, which benefits from several strategies aimed at the imposition of what has to be considered 'common sense'. As such, it cannot be understood exclusively along the continuum of relations of production, and it cannot be deduced by class belonging. Gramsci exerts a shift from economic determinism to the organisation of social orders *via* the material structure of ideology. The focus is therefore on the ways in which, by means of objectification and reification, things acquire a meaning. This move allows researchers to focus on 'the very objectifications of subjective processes in human activity, or the ways in which the socially constructed world is intersubjectively realised' (Bieler and Morton, 2008: 117).

Elaborating on these premises, Foucault, in *The Subject and Power*, decisively empowers the constitutive and foundational nature of discourse. Foucault (1969 [2011]) posits that both unities of discourses and objects are formed 'by means of group controlled decisions' (1969 [2011]: 32), under historically located conditions. Key concepts in its theorisation are those of knowledge and power. As in Gramsci, power is not portrayed exclusively as coercively imposed. It is seen as an ongoing productive creation of shared knowledge and discourse. Through its performative function, power creates both the social world and the discursive categories to access it (Foucault, 1982: 780). In so doing, power locates subjects both in society and in the discursive field; it generates markers for the identity of individuals, objectifying them. In contrast to Althusser's model, an additional component of power is resistance, where individuals struggle against objectification. Foucault contextualises power in the framework of a diversified definition of social structure, determined by 'complex and circular relations' (1982:

781). In this context, individuals engage in what Foucault calls 'anarchical' struggles (1982: 781), somehow shooting against a moving target: 'the *form* of power' (1982: 781, emphasis added). In this context, struggles occur over a semantic field against a contingent sense of oppression. This locates Foucault on the more subject-oriented side of the continuum, and in a more ideational and less material realm.

Deeply engaged with the Frankfurt school, Habermas acknowledges the crucial function of language as a 'medium of domination and social force' (1974: 17, in Forchtner, 2011: 9) and argues against the Marxian tradition that 'politics is [no longer] only a phenomenon of the superstructure' (1971: 101, quoted in Held, 1980: 251). Beyond the analysis of the pathologies of advanced capitalist societies, Habermas assumes that society finds the seeds for social change in communicative action. In the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984), he posits that social actions can be strategic or communicative, depending on 'how they specify the goal-directed actions of different participants: as interlacing of egocentric calculations of utility […] or as reflecting an understanding in the sense of a cooperative process of interpretation' (1984: 101). Communicative actions are oriented towards reciprocal understanding and intersubjectively validated through 'validity claims', '*internally* connected with reasons and grounds' (1984: 209, emphasis in the text). Validity claims therefore set the grounds for the intersubjective establishment of a shared 'moral practical sense' (1984: 209). Through cultural reproduction, social interaction and socialisation, individuals 'coordinate their actions through the intersubjective recognition of criticisable validity claims' (1984: 208). In this context, through the establishment of discursive communities, individuals can achieve collective goals, and empower their shared life-world.

Theoretical diversity in this special issue

In the wake of these pioneering works, selected theories do not presuppose that agents form their identities and interests in isolation from the social context: interaction within the social structure moulds the discursive activities of all subjects. What changes are both the definition of actors' degree of freedom in perceiving the *social structure* and their own and other actors' positions within this structure. This difference determines what constitutes the main structural components around which power is distributed. The blend of ideas and interests in individual motivation and social interactions is generally presented in non-dichotomised terms. What changes is the ways these components relate to each other.

Among selected approaches, constructivists tend to embrace ontological idealism. Arguably, constructivism is all but a homogenous approach (Fierke and Jørgensen, 2001; Price and Reus-Smit, 1998). To make sense of this diversity, Checkel distinguishes three main variants marked by strong epistemological differences: conventional, interpretative and radical/critical (2007: 58). In this introduction, the interpretative school and 'its emphasis on the role of language in mediating and constructing social reality' (Checkel, 2007: 58) are mainly referred to. Constructivist authors have applied this framework to foreign policy and the notion of national interest (Kubálková, 2001; Weldes, 1996).

Interpretative constructivists emphasise the centrality of intersubjective cognitions and norms in the definition of the social structure (Schimmelfennig, 2001: 58). By

discursively interacting within a given structure, agents endogenously construct social reality and, in turn, interactions within the structural context contribute to reconstructing their preferences and interests. The dynamics of communication are largely inspired by Habermas and his distinction between communicative and strategic action (Deitelhoff and Mueller, 2005). While the latter type is oriented to gain hegemony in discursive practices, the former strives to gain recognition and build consensus. The concept of power is therefore deeply related to responsibility (Connolly, 1974: 97 in Guzzini, 2005: 510). Constructivists distance themselves from the rational tenet that ideas and interests are exogenous to any social structure. To explain this ontological turn, Hopf places the question '"who am I?" […] both logically and ontologically prior to the question of "what do I want"' (1998: 175).

In empirical accounts, constructivists generally argue that a logic of appropriateness, rather than a logic of consequentiality (March and Olsen, 1989), informs both the nature of the agents and their reciprocal interactions. Therefore, emphasis is on the process of intersubjective creation of meaning, as led by interpretation (Kratochwil, 1988) and reasoned consensus (Risse, 2000). While not denying the existence of *brute* facts, constructivists claim that in assessing reality, agents enter the semantic field of collective intentionality (Searle, 1995: 23). Through interactions and social filters, individuals encounter a space composed of intersubjective projections of what reality is supposed to be, which mixes 'closeness and remoteness both spatially and temporally' (Berger and Luckmann, 1991 [1996]: 36). Among selected approaches, constructivism is the most ideational. Put simply, its focus is on cooperation, rather than power, stemming from a central tenet: normative concepts are 'the names of the solutions of problems' (Korsgaard, 2003: 116). As normative concepts are 'the names of the solutions of problems', discourses transcend both the material structure of society and individual interests.

In a similar vein, Schmidt's DI (2008) focuses on ideas through the lens of discourse. By placing emphasis on discourse rather than on ideas, Schmidt claims that it is possible to address 'the representation of ideas (how agents say what they are thinking of doing) and the discursive interactions through which actors generate and communicate ideas (to whom they say it) within given institutional contexts (where and when they say it)' (2008: 306). Hence, the term discourse enmeshes textual and contextual elements, components of agency and structure. Accordingly, DI establishes a dialectical relation between agents and structure. Institutions are seen as both influencing agents and being influenced by them (Schmidt, 2008: 314).

Contrary to constructivist approaches, DI posits that arguing (e.g. oriented towards ideational persuasion) and bargaining (e.g. strategically-oriented) discursive practices are inherently intermingled (Schmidt, 2008: 312). In this sense, relying on Boudon, the rationality of agents is conceived as cognitive in nature, e.g. it informs the sense-making process of actors more than the setting-up of their preferences. To come back to the distinction of discourse as being constitutive of or constituted by the social world, Schmidt's DI opposes 'the conflation of material reality and interests into "material interests"' (2008: 312). In a similar way to constructivists, DI refers to Searle's distinction between brute and social facts to depict the wide array of 'real but not material' factors that coincide to frame actors' behaviours. This locates DI closer to constructivism in the continuum.

While recognising the performative and enacting quality of discourses, post-structuralist scholars place emphasis on the concept of power. Derrida's often-cited passage, stating that 'there is nothing outside the text' (Derrida, 1976: 158–159), sums up the tendency of seeing discourse as the key to access the social world. One of the foundations of post-structuralism is the co-constitution of the world and the subject. A key element of post-structuralist ontology stems from the idea that the perceived world acquires meaning through discourse. Discourses provide 'criteria of intelligibility' that 'establish the conditions of possibility for social being and, as such, cannot be considered as separate from, or secondary to the material realm' (de Goede, 2001: 152, quoted in Bieler and Morton, 2008: 110). Semantic signs mediate the relation between the objective reality and the subjective representation of that reality, 'signs [that] derive their meanings not through their relations to reality but through internal relations within the network of signs' (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 11). Interactions among discourses constantly modify the structure of meanings and the perception of social reality. Meanings are therefore highly volatile, contingent, provisional and, as such, elusive. Discourses are modulated by means of interactive articulation through a network of meanings among different signifiers. Both as a concept and as analytical tools, articulation works on three levels:

> Epistemologically, articulation is a way of thinking the structures of what we know as a play of correspondences, non-correspondences and contradictions, as fragments in the constitution of what we take to be unities. Politically, articulation is a way of foregrounding the structure and play of power that entail in relations of dominance and subordination. Strategically, articulation provides a mechanism for shaping intervention within a particular social formation, conjuncture or context (Daryl Slack, 1996: 113).

In this conceptual framework, the concept of discursive struggles depicts the modality of interaction in the discursive field. Recalling Gramsci and Foucault, hegemony is hence not necessarily imposed through coercion, but through the '*organisation of consent*' (Barrett, 1991: 54, emphasis in the text). In as much as post-structuralism (at least in Laclau's and Mouffe's theorisation) detaches discursive dynamics from the structure, 'struggle is reduced to struggle in discourse, where "there is no reason why anything is or isn't potentially articulatable with anything" and society becomes "a totally open discursive field"' (Hall, 1986: 56).

A heterogeneous movement rather than a homogenous school gathers under the heading of CDA. CDA scholars are inspired by different epistemological traditions, generally located in the 'Western Marxist' tradition (Fairclough et al., 2011: 360), ranging from Foucauldian post-structuralism to Habermas, from Gramsci to the Frankfurt School (Forchtner, 2011). CDA is explicitly committed 'towards criticising and changing society, in contrast to traditional theories oriented solely to understanding it or explaining it' (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 6). CDA establishes a dialectic relation between the role of discourse and the real world. In other words, the world *is* out there and material relations influence the positioning of subjects in the real world as well as in the discursive field. Discourses are, therefore, seen as vehicles that reproduce the social domination of one group over another, although power does not necessarily refer to

capitalism. CDA authors alternatively consider power in relation to corporations, gender, race or political relations. As in the continuum presented above, critical discourse analysts generally assume that the relations that tie up social and discursive practices are 'dialectical in the sense of being different but not "discrete", i.e. not fully separated' (Fairclough, 2010: 231). By giving social practices centrality, CDA 'allows an oscillation between the perspective of social structure and the perspective of social action and agency – both necessary perspectives in social research and analysis' (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002: 193).

Among the selected approaches, CDA, in its different variants, is the one with the clearest commitment to linguistic analysis. This focus 'accounts for its emphasis upon practical ways of analysing texts, and the attention that it gives to the role of grammar in its ideological analysis' (Fairchlough et al., 2011: 361). Linguistic analysis is therefore pursued through a variety of methodologies (for a review, see Wodak and Meyer, 2009). CDA does not strive to investigate the linguistic unit per se, but analyses broader social phenomena (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 2). The heterogeneity that characterises CDA makes it difficult to generalise as far as tenets, focus, and methods of analysis are concerned. Wodak (2008) suggested seven underlying themes in CDA. These can be summarized as: (1) an interest in the language in use (as opposed to abstract language); (2) a focus on texts, discourses, conversations, acts of speech or events as units of analysis; (3) an extension of linguistics beyond isolated sentences; (4) the inclusion of non-verbal elements in the analysis; (5) a focus on dynamic interactional moves and strategies; (6) a focus on the contexts in which language is used and its functions; and (7) linguistic attention to text grammar and language use.

This section only superficially highlighted the main tenets of selected approaches, drastically simplifying their internal heterogeneity. However, as can be noted, placing selected theoretical approaches within the two-dimensional continuum of material/ideational components and the constitutiveness of reality/discourses helps to spot similarities and differences between cognate discourse-analysis approaches. The next section will focus on the question of 'who does the speaking in EU foreign policy' and will present different theoretical insights on how to make sense of the EU discursive field in relation to EU agents.

Discourse analysis and EU foreign policy: the question of 'who does the speaking'

> The 'self' needs quotation marks because an order of expectations cannot be expected to contain an identifiable self; it remains an order of distributions that operate on one another (Leydesdorff, 2006: 541).

Both the EU and the process of European integration in foreign policy matters are contested discursive fields (Hay and Rosamond, 2002: 151). When travelling from the state level to the EU level, an open and heterogeneous discursive environment is encountered, where the very existence of a minimum of cultural homogeneity is a matter of

discussion. Throughout its evolution, the main architects of European integration have given a plurality of definitions to what the EU (and previously the European Community) is. These definitions range from an '*objet politique non-identifié*' (Jacques Delors, 1987, in Schmitter, 1996: 1) to 'a technocratic edifice' (paraphrased from de Gaulle, 1965, quoted in Nelson and Stubb, 2003: 33), from 'a Family of Nations' (Thatcher, 1992, in Nelson and Stubb, 2003) to a '*concept* charged with significance' (Delors, 1989, 2003: 59, in Nelson and Stubb, 2003, emphasis added). This *concept* has been alternatively portrayed as sustained by 'solidarity in production' (Schumany scholars highlighted that the EU is a 'flexible and disaggregated series of patterns, arrangements and institutions which expresses a collective yet pluralistic identity […]' (Allen and Smith, 1990: 23)). It is best conceptualised as a 'variable and multi-dimensional presence', certainly not a unified actor (Allen and Smith, 1990: 20). Scholars, therefore, focused on the 'fragmented nature of agency at the European level' (White, 1999: 44), and connected this inherent fragmentation with definitions of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in terms of a *policy process*, rather than as a policy (Edwards, 1997). Hence, both with reference to the term 'common' and that of 'policy', scholars of European integration have underlined the mislead of the formula 'Common Foreign and Security Policy' inaugurated with the Maastricht Treaty: for Ginsberg it can be regarded as a 'system in evolution towards "a" European Foreign Policy', (2001: 33), for Edwards (1997) it is a misnomer, and for Schmalz (1998) it is mere rhetoric.

Despite this fragmented condition, several scholars suggest that it is still possible to employ the tools of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) to analyse the EU's foreign policy system (White, 1999), or to peer into the European foreign policy 'black box' through institutionalist lenses (Smith, 1996, 2004). This spurred some analysts to assume an actor-centred approach (White, 1999). By focusing on actors, processes, issues, instruments, contexts and actions related to the EU foreign policy system, it becomes possible to conceptualise European Foreign Policy (EFP) 'as a part of a political system … with inputs from national actors and their preferences (in conjunction with domestic politics) and from external sources; and with the outputs or foreign policy actions and positions' (Ginsberg, 2001: 39).

Despite its challenging nature, therefore, not dissimilarly from states, the EU is primarily a 'collective actor', which expresses a pluralistic identity. The question of 'who does the speaking' in IR opens up endless theoretical discussions on how and through what kind of socio-political processes collective actors produce statements. To resume briefly the entity of this debate, the 'two-bodies' metaphor, elaborated during the 16th century, can be referred to: the physical body of the juvenile King Edward IV, and his body politic – the Crown. The latter 'intangible body' (conceived as the real core of political activities) availed the former to act in ways that went beyond the 'minority', 'infirmity', 'old age', and 'birth or death' of the physical body (Coleman, 1974: 19–20).

In light of this distinction, capitalised Foreign Policy can be conceived of as an activity of 'production and reproduction of the identity in whose name it operates […] a modern cultural artefact implicated in the intensification of power in the state' (Campbell, 2005: 68). Subsequently, Foreign Policy constitutes a form of 'containment of challenges' against both 'internal' and 'external' political contestation (Campbell, 2005: 71). Along

the same lines, Diez (2013) identifies three levels of 'struggle', or contestation, in Campbell's parlance. First, the level of individual participants in discourse; second, the level of discursive positions (see also Epstein, 2010), which finds collective actors in the semantic field in a variety of complex ways; and third, the level of the overall discourse, e.g. 'competing discursive positions that are not only actively pursued by collective actors, but also shape the latter's identities' (Diez, 2013).

In this introduction, a different perspective is taken, and it is suggested that discursive positions can be located within the EU foreign policy system of governance. While aware that collective subject positions in the EU system of governance are not summarised by their institutional location, national as well as bureaucratic heterogeneity call for reference to the positions of agents in the EU structure.

In order to act and speak at the international level, a complex system has been established. Rosamond (2005) offers two different reasons for explaining the inherently plural nature of this system. First, the 'fragmented nature of agency at the European level' (White, 1999: 48) enables different national and institutional actors to act and speak on behalf of the EU. Second, the changing attribution of competences creates a plurality of processes that contributes to shaping the EU's external action. Accordingly, at the executive level the management of foreign policy issues is entrusted to four sets of actors who intervene in the creation of foreign policy measures.

The division of competences defines the roles of all actors and the scope of their interventions throughout the policy process. Two main policy methods converge in the making of foreign policies: for so-called 'high politics', the prevalent method is intergovernmental; for 'low politics' it is community-based. The Lisbon treaty, therefore, maintained the approach 'to streamline foreign policy by combining external action across the pillar system of divergent competences created by the Maastricht Treaty' (Laatikainen, 2010: 476). In turn, a dynamic and fluid network of informal exchanges cuts across and blurs the boundaries of both competences and the attribution of competences.

For each set of competences, the EU relies on different individual national or institutional executive agents to produce foreign policy statements. In turn, even when agreeing on principles for action, the EU does not necessarily speak with one voice, but through several voices that sing the same tune. Table 1 below summarises these institutional arrangements. In addition to these, other EU actors can speak on behalf of the EU on more specific contexts. For instance, the President of the Central European Bank or the President of the Eurogroup may explain the EU position in multilateral fora such as the International Monetary Fund, the G8 or the G20. The growing institutional importance of both the European Parliament and the intervention of the European Court of Justice (Hillion, 2009; Jørgensen and Wessel, 2011) in shaping the EU's international discourse can be acknowledged. However, due to their relative limitation, this introduction does not locate these actors in the proposed grid.

Even in this simplified grid, 'the projection of the EU to the outside [remains] as complex as the variegation that characterises its internal governance' (Rosamond, 2005: 465). Different procedures, individual actors, venues and informal and formal codes of conduct inform discursive interactions. Instead of simplifying the institutional structure,

Table 1. Actors, competences and ability to speak at the international level[a].

Executive actors converging in the process of foreign policy-making	Attributions of competences	Actors entitled to speak
The councils	Ultimate decision-makers, intervening in all EU measures	The President of the European Council speaks in the name of the EU. The rotating Presidency or other member states can also speak on behalf of the EU
The commission	Power of initiative, policy-formulation and policy-implementation of common measures in first pillar and mixed competences	The President of the EU Commission and different Commissioners speak in their areas of competence
High Representative-Vice President of the Commission (HR/VP); assisted by the European External Action Service (EEAS)	Power of initiative, policy-formulation in second pillar competences	The HR speaks in Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)
The Member States (MS)	Still competences of exclusive pertinence of the MS	MS representative in their own capacity, regardless of the formal attribution of competences

[a]This article refers to the old Maastricht terminology based on pillars to make sense of the attribution of competences at the EU level. It is, indeed, argued that despite the rhetoric of de-pillarization, a real de-pillarization did not occur for foreign and external policies (Carta, 2011).

this overall reorganisation crowded even further the 'leadership table' (Nugent and Rhinard, 2011: 13).

In discourse-analysis terms, this network of relations represents the semantic field where a given discourse is articulated and produces effects (Keeley, 1990: 96). This dis-aggregated collective structure defines the modalities of articulating foreign policy discourse within the EU. How do different actors interact in the foreign policy-making environment? How do they tune the EU international voice?

Simplifying the constructivist perspective, any discourse has to be considered as legitimate by the in-group; that is, it has to provide the basis for a reasoned consensus (Risse, 2000) on the grounds of moral, legal or ideological grounds (Breeze, 2012). Interactions between national and institutional actors within the EU thus define the borders of legitimate discourses, and in-group discursive articulations concur to fix meanings by means of 'sociocultural conceptualisations' (Silverstein, 2004 in Reyes, 2011). In this perspective, socialisation and exposure to common norms make it impossible not to engage with the rules and principles that characterise a given regime. As with the meaning of membership, however, shared norms and collective action do not rely on authoritative interpretation, and are constantly collectively established (Kratochwil, 1988: 276). This

consideration raises the possibility that in the act of interpretation, other (competitive) principles converge and co-constitute the discursive environment, thereby contributing to the framing of common discourse.

From a Foucauldian perspective, members of a community are not driven by a single logic. Contestation and competition characterise the breeding ground upon which a common discourse is constituted. Any shared discourse embodies both instances of convergence and competition over the framing of common meanings. Hence, it is the EU discursive environment that defines the social context in which a common discourse is articulated. As Diez (in 2013) posits, discursive practices within the EU serve both 'enabling' and 'disabling' discourses, by defining not only the nature of discourses but also the limits of the discursive fields. This continuous process of contestation and enabling and disabling meanings contributes to constructing the European identity and its foreign policy. In a constant struggle over meanings, several discursive strategies 'over naming and evaluating things; applicable arguments and standards of judgements; and over objectives and mechanisms' coexist (Keeley, 1990: 97).

The discourse that prevails originates from dynamic interactions, led by differing logics. As such, contingent policy outcomes will not necessarily coherently reflect the original intentions of actors. Power relations are therefore mediated by the social structure in which discursive practices occur, and are reflected in 'the temporary hegemony of a particular political discourse' (Larsen, 1997: 22). Thus, seen through the lens of different discourse analysis perspectives, a different blend of material and ideational discursive patterns can be identified. On the one hand, different actors obey a shared set of rules (Searle, 1969 [1996]) and principles that define the borders of what is considered socially acceptable and legitimate. On the other hand, actors enact different discursive strategies in different contexts to pursue their goals and adapt to the goals of other actors. In this regard, different discourse-analyses complement each other in depicting both the main features of the EU discursive field and contiguous discursive practices.

Beyond the policy-making discursive field, a wider semantic field, where discourses over European governance are articulated, includes the member states' polities. Accordingly, as Diez has argued, the structure of EU discourse is inherently layered, consisting of three layers: 'the "state-nation core concept", the "relational position vis-a-vis Europe" and the question of "what kind of Europe is promoted"' (2001: 11). Following the layered structure of the EU discourse, the focus of discourse-analysis approaches with regard to European integration varies widely. Post-structuralist contributions (Hansen, 2006; Larsen, 1997) have tended to focus their attention on selected EU member states' discourses on foreign policy; CDA have tended to focus on the EU institutional discourses on given policy fields (see Aydın-Düzgit, 2013); and DI and constructivist approaches traditionally have had a swinging focus on both. For instance, DI has focused on the coordinative dimensions of discourses to depict the interactions between different levels of the EU multilevel foreign policy environment, whereas the member states are significantly constrained by the domestic dynamics of both interactive and communicative practices (see Rayroux, 2013).

As Shepherd notes, the 'ways in which institutions are sites of discursive power and both product/productive of particular discourses' in turn 'constitute particular

horizons of possibilities' (2008: 385). Since the EU is widely considered a *sui generis* engine composed by multifaceted identities (Manners and Whitman, 2003), is there any specific discourse that these interactions produce in terms of foreign policy discourse? From the point of view of normative theory, there are at least two important related questions. On the one hand, there is the question of how to 'reconcile unity and diversity'; on the other, there is a problem of 'dual ontology', i.e. 'the need to theorize in a way that models appropriately the moral standing of both individuals and states in relation to each other as well as in relation to the supranational level' (Dobson, 2006: 515).

Drawing from Duchêne's notion of the EU as a 'civilian power' (1972) and from Manners' seminal article on the EU as a 'normative power' (2002), a vast body of literature reasoned on the putative moral distinctiveness of the EU as an international actor. By relying on a conception of power based on ideational factors, Manners claims that the EU progressively developed the ability to 'redefine what *can* be normal in international relations' (2002: 253). Yet, other authors contended that the EU tends to act as a pragmatic power: acting in a 'flexible, prudent, sometimes innovative, sometimes opportunist' way (Wood, 2011: 244), by mixing 'instrumentalist security-oriented dynamics […] within the parameters set by norms defining the EU's identity' (Youngs, 2004: 415). Simón (2012), for instance, argues that the EU's emphasis on effective multilateralism and 'soft crisis management' may indeed have been strategically informed. In the 2000s, this emphasis was useful to highlight Europe's contrast with a markedly unilateral and militaristic US administration that was met with a strong feeling of public rejection across Europe and throughout the world. As Carta in this special issue suggests, the analysis of discursive practices can only convey differentiated patterns of foreign policy discourses, articulated through a variety of strategies. Different discursive patterns range from normative-based statements based on the values inherent in interstate institutionally disciplined foreign policy practices, to an inherently colonising discourse over presuming superiority of the EU, up to strategically oriented foreign policy formulation.

Structure of the special issue

The contributions gathered in this special issue importantly refer to both the diversity in the making of the EU's international discourses and the diversity of theoretical lenses adopted to make sense of it.

The contribution of Knud Erik Jørgensen sets the scene for the contributions on institutional discourses. Jørgensen focuses his attention on the European External Action Service and highlights the ways in which the EU level interacts with the member states' national constituencies. The distinction between the general public, the attentive public and the policy opinion elite (Almond, 1960) guides Jørgensen in introducing the wider European context in which interaction between EU POE and national attentive publics occur. His analysis highlights two central points: on the one hand, POE communicates with the attentive public by means of abstract concepts, symbols and principles. On the other, public philosophies conveyed in POE communication strategies tend not to focus on foreign policy and are markedly uninterested in legitimating policy contents vis-a-vis the EU national constituencies.

   The contribution of Thomas Diez adopts a post-structuralist approach. Drawing from previous works (1999), Diez's contribution posits that discourse analysis can enrich the analysis of European integration in three complementary ways: an 'Austinian' move, which focuses on speech acts; a 'Focauldian' move, which focuses on the construction of meanings; and a 'Derridean' move, which highlights the centrality of differences in the process of meaning-construction. By crucially referring to the concept of discursive struggles, he highlights both the 'enabling' and the 'disabling' functions of discourse articulations. This tenet sheds light on the twin processes of the marginalisation of certain discourses and the prevalence of others.

   Carta examines ways in which individual civil servants of the Commission and the EEAS frame their discourses on the EU's international actions and its underlying core values. By relying on a critical discourse analysis strategy, she analyses the conceptions of foreign governance options held by foreign policy actors. The article identifies three main patterns of discourse-making and associates them with metaphors coming from the western European literature tradition: two figures taken from Voltaire's Candide – Candide and Pangloss – and a character taken from a Mozart's opera, Don Giovanni.

   The article by Senem Aydın-Düzgit introduces contributions of national discourses on the EU's foreign policies. By reviewing post-structuralist and CDA discourse analysis applications, Aydın-Düzgit offers good insight into discourse-analysis methodologies. While acknowledging a certain tendency to refute methodology as grounds for discourse analysis, she sheds light on several methodologically grounded techniques that can inform empirical analysis. In particular, Aydın-Düzgit's contribution offers a wide range of methodological guidelines for applying CDA to the analysis of foreign policy.

   Two contributions present discourses from national actors; Larsen looks at the Danish and Rayroux at the French and Irish cases. Larsen focuses on discursive articulations of the national 'we' at the EU level. He identifies concomitant ways in which member states articulate their 'national we' with the EU in their foreign policy practices. Drawing from Foucault's, Laclau's and Mouffe's theorisations, Larsen elaborates on four different articulations of member-state identities with the EU and offers an empirical analysis that follows these articulations across policy-areas and geographical areas. Larsen finds that the way in which the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-articulates its national 'we' with the EU follows a mixed pattern, which generally highlights an instrumental value of the EU for Denmark.

   Antoine Rayroux adopts the concept of constructive ambiguity. He contends that rationalist explanations have so far failed to depict the cognitive and normative components of ambiguity in the construction of the EU as a political entity. Relying on Schmidt's DI, Rayroux's analysis shows how different institutional settings contribute to shaping national discourses on common security and defence policy in both France and Ireland. He analyses a plethora of different actors' statements by showing how different voices shape and constrain the final national position. He highlights that constructive ambiguity allows government representatives to reduce conflicts in the domestic context and project CSDP as a natural continuation of national preferences.

   This brief overview aimed to provide insight into the theoretical endeavour of the following contributions, while certainly not paying adequate tribute to their analytical complexity. An attentive reader will find an insightful and eclectic review of approaches in the following pages.

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Author biographies

Caterina Carta is lecturer at Vesalius College and associated GR:EEN researcher at the Institut d'Etudes Européennes de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles (IEE-ULB). She holds a PhD in Comparative and European Politics awarded by the University of Siena. She recently published *The European Union's Diplomatic Service: Ideas, Preferences and Identities* (Routledge, 2012). Her research interests cover European Foreign Policy, European Diplomacy and External Relations of the European Union and discourse analysis.

Jean-Frédéric Morin is professor of international relations at the Université libre de Bruxelles, where he teaches international political economy, foreign policy analysis and global environmental politics. He has an interdisciplinary background, including a dual PhD in law and political science. His most recent research projects study the impact of intergovernmentalism on policy diffusion, the drivers of policy coherence, and interactions between epistemic communities.