

Book review

The power of discourse: an introduction to discourse analysis

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Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. New Jersey 1998
9780805 826364 (ISBN 0-8058-2636-X) 438PP Paperback

This book stems from years of research and teaching discourse analysis by Moira Chimombo and Robert Roseberry who at one time jointly taught Discourse Analysis to an Honours class in the University of Malawi. The book focuses on speech, which being so common, often little attention is paid to what people fail to do with it and what is achieved through it is taken for granted. This is an introductory book to discourse analysis and answers not just the question of what people do when they communicate but is a practical approach to the analysis of discourse or that which most people believe do when they attempt to communicate through words, gestures, or signs.

In part one, the authors define discourse and its context and language. Discourse is the communicative process resulting in a communicative act realized as text. Text is often thought in terms of the written or printed words on a page. However, the authors show that verbal and nonverbal materials for communication are texts as well. Sign language, spoken words which may comprise thoughts of a writer or speaker and, on the other hand, those of a reader or listener, are all texts. In addition, symbols, gestures, sounds or silences in any combination that is intended for communication of information such as ideas, emotional states or attitudes, do form texts. Thus the definition of text in discourse given here is quite broad with the underlying meaning being the intention to communicate information, whether it succeeds or fails to communicate. Discourse consists two interacting dimensions: context and language. Context and language interact simultaneously to realize a text. The context of discourse provides for the interpretation of a text in discourse and it includes culture, discourse participants, producer-interpreter relationships, setting, channel, participant-text relations, purpose and intent, and topic of discourse.

The language of discourse which interacts with context in realizing the text of discourse determines what the text come to mean. The authors distinguish two genres - the description of the structure of a text as defined which are the conversational and written genres, each having its appropriate language called **register**. The appropriate language has the high probability of occurring in its given genre than in the other. A full description of a text should include the identification of the genre and the specification of the register. Judgement of whether the text is appropriate or not is based on how the text relates with its context while judgement of its grammaticality is based on the register or allowable language of the genre. For acceptability, the text must pass both of these. To explain and exemplify the above, the authors discuss referencing and coreferencing, words and lexical units, substitution and ellipsis, conjunction and clause relations, linguistic features, literal and non-literal meaning, implicature, presupposition and inference and nonverbal meaning. Through these the authors draw connections between words and what they mean in communication process often taken for granted. Examples are drawn from newspaper articles, cartoons and adverts, verbal and non-verbal communication.

Part two examines discourse in use. It deals with the product of the process of discourse - the text. While part one defines and illustrates discourse analysis, part two draws examples from specific institutions of discourse and shows what is the result of discoursing. The discourse of education, medicine, law, news media and literature are cases. Throughout this part, the authors show that while text, which is the product of discourse, is unchangeable once produced, in general, changes over time. This is because the text is interpreted in the context which changes with time. For example, a text that is acceptable in one age may not be acceptable in the next, despite the text having not changed. This is what the authors refer to as change of the text.

A reading of part one is necessary to make the most of part two. The skills gained in analysis of discourse in part one are a prerequisite for handling work in part two, which is basically a practice section. This second part is largely an application of the skills of discourse analysis. It shows how culture, discourse participants, producer-interpreter relationships, setting, channel, participant-text relations, purpose and intent, and topic determine the nature of discourse in the five selected institutions apart from examining the language of discourse applicable to each.

The Power of Discourse is an excellent book for individuals who not only want to learn to analyse the process of discourse and discourse itself but also want to improve their own production in discourse. Chapter 1 and 2 which constitute the first part have, apart

from the discussion, guidelines for using the skills of discourse analysis to analyse a text, sample analysis and an application for practice. Each chapter has a suggested reading list. Also the book has a comprehensive bibliographical reference with an author and subject index making it easy to cross-reference.

It is probably the most fully illustrated and exemplified book on discourse analysis on the market that should find its place in the libraries and lecture rooms. Though discourse is an extremely complex process, the author's presentation and exemplification makes discourse analysis an exciting exercise, makes learning to analyse speech a pleasure. The authors are careful not to explain discourse analysis but take their students' into analysing discourse from varied contexts. Practice materials are part of each section to guide the student into working with the ideas presented. It is these that make this book unique in discourse analysis and an indispensable companion of both the teacher and student of discourse analysis.

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