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Editorial

Discourse analysis as social analysis

Discourse & Society was founded with the aim to publish outstanding work that explores the relations between structures and strategies of text, talk or communication, on the one hand, and social, political or cultural structures and processes, on the other hand. That this aim is ambitious may be clear from the number of submitted papers that fail to meet the editorial evaluation criteria that have been developed to realize this multidisciplinary aim. More often than not, submitted papers are either short on explicit discourse analysis, or provide insufficient insight into the social dimensions, backgrounds or constraints of discourse.

Traditional disciplinary divisions in academic teaching and research are the main cause of such one-sided expertise. Scholars with a specialization in grammar, or in the study of narrative, argumentation, rhetoric, style or other properties of language and discourse, are seldom educated or interested in social, political or cultural analysis. And despite the broad and increasing interest in discourse and conversation analysis in sociology, anthropology and communication studies, such interest does not define the mainstream in these disciplines. Moreover, until recently, much conversation analysis in the social sciences focused on the immanent properties of talk as interpersonal interaction, and bracketed the broader societal or political frameworks in which such conversations are embedded. Although good theoretical and methodological reasons have been adduced to question the macro-level concepts of traditional sociology, this exclusive focus on the micro-level details of social interaction has contributed to the regrettable macro-micro cleft in the social sciences as well as in the multidisciplinary study of discourse.

On the other hand, those talking in terms of overall societal and political structures and processes of social systems, groups, group relations, institutions, nations, cities or historical changes, or engaging in accounts of their properties, such as those of power and inequality, are seldom inclined to examine how such societal macrostructures are understood, defined, enacted, sustained, legitimated and reproduced in everyday discourse and other forms of interaction of social actors.

Linguists and discourse analysts are often satisfied with an account of the seemingly autonomous realm of grammatical rules, the semantics of textual coherence, rhetorical devices, stylistic variations in lexicalization, appropriateness conditions of speech acts, strategies of turn-taking, sequencing, politeness or face-management, or their underlying cognitive structures and processes, among many other properties of text and talk and their ongoing production and understanding. And although it is routinely emphasized in much discourse and conversational analysis that text and talk are contextualized, context analysis is often reduced to shallow accounts of interpersonal, situational

factors of interaction that fail to satisfy those who expect new insights into the relations between discourse and society or analytical answers to pressing social issues.

To wit, when, in the early 1980s, I started my work on the discursive reproduction of racism, there was virtually no discourse or conversation analytical work that provided a theoretical framework to thus link societal systems of inequality with the details of text and talk. Although the present situation in discourse analysis has changed, and although orthodoxies in micro- and macro-approaches begin to crumble, most scholars continue to prefer to work on their own, safe side of the divide. Some notable exceptions may be found in areas of research that deal with social issues that need an integrated account, as is the case for gender and gender inequality in women's studies.

Despite some studies on 'political language', discourse and conversational analysis has thus far had little to offer to political science and the kind of problems studied there. Similar remarks hold for the vast field of the study of the many discourse genres of the mass media. The courtroom has attracted some conversation analysts, but their studies cover merely a tiny fragment of the immense domain of legal text and talk. Analyses of medical, educational, service or bureaucratic talk abound, but their focus on the minutiae of the same or similar structures and strategies of conversational interaction in various institutional settings seldom contributes to the 'real' problems and issues in these respective social domains. The same is true for most analyses of the text-grammatical, rhetorical, stylistic, narrative or argumentative properties of political, legal, educational or medical texts.

Since discourse and conversation analysts can hardly be expected to be full-fledged sociologists, political scientists and legal scholars at the same time, social and political scientists might in turn be urged to take into account the theoretical and methodological advances of discourse analysis for the study of their respective problems. For papers from the social sciences submitted to *Discourse & Society*, this means that it is obviously insufficient to merely juggle with such terms as 'text', 'discourse' or 'conversation', and fail to examine, systematically and explicitly, their detailed phonological, graphical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, lexical, rhetorical, interactional or cognitive structures and strategies. And for the fashionable philosophical and literary approaches to text and discourse, this means that vague and metaphorical terminology is no substitute for such explicit analyses. On the contrary, much post-structuralist 'writing' too often indulges in pre-structuralist impressionism, which is neither good social analysis nor good discourse analysis.

In short, from both sides of the divide, theoretical and methodological bridges need to be built. Discourse analysis, as practised in *Discourse & Society*, should also be genuine social, political or cultural analysis, and, vice versa, social and political problems also need to be accounted for in discourse analytical terms. Papers that make an effort to realize this crucial integration are particularly welcome.

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