

# Editor's introduction

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Discourse analysis is a rich and multifaceted, cross-disciplinary, field that is broadly concerned with the structures and functions of language in use – discourse. The term ‘discourse analysis’ has its roots in the work of Zellig Harris (1952), an American structuralist, who coined the term to designate a formal method for analysing language ‘above the sentence’. That is, Harris saw discourse as the highest rank-level of linguistic organisation and discourse analysis as an area of descriptive linguistics akin to phonology, morphology, and syntax. However, Harris recognised two different ways of approaching discourse analysis:

one can approach discourse analysis from two types of problems, which turn out to be related. The first is the problem of continuing descriptive linguistics beyond the limits of a single sentence at a time. The other is the question of correlating ‘culture’ and ‘language’ (i.e. non-linguistic and linguistic behaviour).

(Harris, 1952: 1)

Harris’s work focussed on the first of these issues and discourse analysis in this sense has since become an important part of linguistics (e.g. Brown and Yule, 1983; Schiffrin, 1994). Indeed, up until the 1970s ‘discourse analysis’ meant, almost exclusively, looking at the structural properties of linguistic units larger than the sentence (Reisigl, 2011). Since then, however, ‘discourse analysis’ has come increasingly to cover a broad range of scholarship addressing the second issue identified by Harris. Discourse analysis in this second sense is not concerned so much with the mechanics of discourse as it with the social actions performed in and through discourse, which are constitutive of the identities, relations, norms, values, institutions, conventions, and expectations etc. that define a given ‘culture’. That is, with discourse as a form of social practice. Of course, the two issues are closely connected, as Harris observed, such that it is not possible to address one in isolation from the other (Coulthard, 1985; Johnstone, 2002). Rather, as always, the distinction is a matter of emphasis. Approaches to discourse analysis which emphasise the connections

between discourse and social dynamics take many forms, coming from quite different academic disciplines, with different methods, perspectives, and epistemologies. Such approaches, for example, come from disciplines as far-ranging as sociology, anthropology, and psychology. However, approaches to discourse analysis in this broader ‘social’ sense have also been developed in linguistics as a form of *applied linguistics*, and this is where the present book is situated. The principle chapters in this book all outline approaches to discourse analysis which are based in linguistics but which go beyond the structural analysis of discourse to see discourse as indexical of, and constitutive of, structures and conditions in society. One particularly influential form of discourse analysis in the applied linguistics sense that developed in the late part of the twentieth century is *critical discourse analysis* (originally *critical linguistics*) (e.g. Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Fowler et al., 1979; Hodge and Kress, 1979). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is not a single approach to discourse analysis – it is not, itself, homogeneous and is not associated with any specific method. Rather, what characterises CDA, as with other forms of critical social research, is a desire to transcend the standard academic tasks of describing and explaining, in the most objective way possible, and to instead adopt an openly political stance and seek social change through intellectual inquiry. Researchers in CDA therefore usually start from some perceived social problem, such as social inequality, and use the various tools afforded by discourse analysis to show how patterns of language use contribute to creating and sustaining that problem. A critical perspective is thus possible with any approach to discourse analysis and many, though not all, of the chapters in this volume do assume an explicitly critical stance toward the data they analyse.

There are many excellent and recent textbooks introducing linguistic and applied linguistics approaches to discourse analysis, including CDA (e.g. Bartlett, 2014; Blommaert, 2005; Bloor and Bloor, 2007; Gee, 2014a, 2014b; Georgakopoulou and Goutsos, 2004; Jones, 2012; Machin and Mayr, 2012; Paltridge, 2012; Simpson and Mayr, 2009). There are also several comprehensive handbooks (e.g. Flowerdew and Richardson, 2017; Gee and Handford, 2013; Hart and Cap, 2014; Jaworski and Coupland, 2006; Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton, 2001; van Dijk, 2011). However, this book is neither intended as a textbook nor as a handbook. As suggested by its title, the book is intended to provide a practical guide for students of linguistics, whether undergraduate or post-graduate, who, perhaps for a taught module or as part of a dissertation or thesis, are embarking on an independent research project in discourse analysis (in the applied linguistics sense). It aims not only to provide an introduction to theoretical and analytical concepts in different approaches to discourse analysis but also to make explicit and explain the kind of decisions and practical steps involved in operationalising those concepts in a discourse analysis project. In other words, the book aims to make transparent those

parts of the research process that researchers often take for granted in their writings and which, as a result, are not always immediately accessible to students.

Even discourse analysis in the more restricted sense of applied linguistics is multifaceted, consisting of various approaches that draw on and apply different models of linguistic description and different methods of linguistic inquiry, so that students can sometimes find it difficult to orient themselves. Common questions are: Which approach should I take? What kind of data should I analyse and how do I set about collecting it? What consideration should I give to ethics? How do I make my analyses systematic and rigorous? How do I report my findings? This book is intended to help students find answers to questions such as these. It therefore has a focus on issues of research design, methodology, and presentation throughout. Indeed, while the first chapter provides an overview of definitions, decisions, and debates in discourse analysis, all of the remaining chapters follow the same basic structure: (i) introduction; (ii) outline of approach; (iii) identifying research questions; (iv) data collection and ethics; (v) analysing and interpreting data; (vi) presenting findings and results; (vii) issues and limitations; and (viii) further reading. This places the book more in the vein of a research methods guide (e.g. Litosseliti, 2010; Podesva and Sharma, 2013) dedicated specifically to the subject of discourse analysis.

I hope that (prospective) students of discourse analysis will read the whole book in order to gain an insight into some of the different approaches that one can take toward a discourse analysis project, as well as to appreciate the connections between approaches and the recurrent themes and decisions involved in any research project. However, one or two chapters are always likely to stand out as most relevant for a given project and each chapter can be read independently of the others.

As a result of its practical focus, the book is organised around different analytical frameworks in discourse analysis rather than particular domains of language use (e.g. politics, law, health, literature). Alongside a general overview, each chapter, with the exception of the first and the final one, presents a particular case study by way of illustration. However, this should not be taken as implying that the approach in question is limited to only that data type. Although different approaches have been designed to account for specific phenomena in discourse – from turn-taking to transitivity, from metaphor to collocation and semantic prosody – and clearly lend themselves to analysing different quantities of data (e.g. large versus small samples), produced in different modalities (e.g. spoken versus written), the same or similar discourse phenomena occur across domains and genres, albeit where they may function differently and need to be analytically interpreted within their local context. Thus, while many of the chapters in this volume happen to focus on discourse topics and genres that can be characterised, more or less broadly, as ‘political’ (Chilton and Schäffner, 2002), the methods of linguistic analysis illustrated, including those based in systemic functional

linguistics, corpus linguistics, and cognitive linguistics, can also be applied to texts produced in other, e.g. literary or legal, contexts, as indeed they have been in the fields of stylistics (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010; Simpson, 2014) and forensic linguistics (Coulthard and Johnson, 2016; Coulthard, Johnson, and Wright, 2013) respectively. Equally, methods of analysis such as conversation analysis, which in this volume is illustrated with reference to the literary setting of book groups, are equally applied in other interactional settings within ‘political’ realms (e.g. Hutchby, 2006).

The chapters contained within this book are all written by researchers currently working in the Department of Linguistics and English Language at Lancaster University in the UK. The approaches covered reflect the kinds of projects our students most frequently undertake. This, of course, may be down to the particular makeup of the department and the book, therefore, does not necessarily cover all approaches that could potentially have been included. But it does cover what we feel are currently the most interesting and popular of approaches, which have a firm footing in linguistics and whose models and methods are therefore likely to be familiar to students of linguistics and/or English language. This includes well-established approaches based in conversation analysis, ethnography, systemic functional linguistics, and corpus linguistics. However, it also includes newer and more nascent approaches based in cognitive linguistics, multimodal social semiotics, digitally mediated communication studies, and experimental methods. It is hoped, then, that as the field of discourse analysis continues to change and expand in new directions, the book will provide a valuable resource for students of discourse analysis for at least a few years to come.

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