Review of Ruth Wodak and Paul Chilton's (2005) A New Agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis

Adam Hodges, University of Colorado at Boulder

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/adamhodges/14/
theoretical backgrounds. The diversity of theory and context is commendable in this book, and its presentation of alternate ideas and approaches allows its reader to come to their own informed conclusions about how they believe identity in discourse is best investigated. In this sense, I have no doubt it will prove a highly valuable resource for teachers, scholars, and students of identity alike.

REFERENCES


Reviewed by ADAM HODGES

*A New Agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis* builds upon the three-decade long tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) – and its precursor Critical Linguistics – to offer a future vision decidedly marked by interdisciplinary approaches. Indeed, the interdisciplinary theme iterated throughout the volume is the one thread that ties together this broad collection of papers.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I, ‘Interdisciplinarity and (C)DA’, discusses a range of theoretical issues and methodologies. The contributors, all important figures in the development of CDA, raise critical challenges for the field to consider and suggest new agendas for the pursuit of their solutions. Part II, ‘Implementing interdisciplinarity’, provides analyses – largely centered on discourses of European identities – that apply interdisciplinary thinking. Part III,
‘Inside and outside traditional disciplines’, moves into the realms of sociology and anthropology to highlight the integration of discourse analysis into these fields.

Part I aptly begins with Theo van Leeuwen’s overview of the way interdisciplinarity has historically been incorporated into academic research. In ‘Three models of interdisciplinarity’, Van Leeuwen discusses the ‘centralist’, ‘pluralist’ and ‘integrationist’ models. In the centralist model, a traditional academic discipline sees itself ‘as the centre of the universe of knowledge, and, from this centre, charts its relations to other disciplines’ (p. 3). The focus, therefore, is on the autonomy of disciplines with their core theories and methodologies. Both the strength and weakness of centralist approaches, according to Van Leeuwen, is their development of important methodologies, which encourages disciplined thinking on the one hand, but discourages the pursuit of important issues that fall beyond the reach of those methodologies. The pluralist model treats the same issue from the different perspectives offered by separate disciplines. In this way, varying points of view shed new light on the subject under study. The integrationist model involves a more dynamic collaboration among disciplines. Here, we see the use of diverse methodologies and a focus on ‘problems rather than methods’ (p. 7).

In ‘Missing links in mainstream CDA: Modules, blends and the critical instinct’, Paul Chilton provides an agenda for CDA firmly rooted in cognition and argues that linguistic researchers, critical discourse analysts included, need to pay more ‘attention to the human mind’ (p. 22). The discussion draws from ideas on modularity (Fodor 1983) and speculations on the evolutionary development of cognition (Cosmides and Tooby 1992). The forays into evolutionary psychology may leave many socially oriented discourse analysts wondering whether their focus on society has anything to do with the agenda Chilton advocates. Yet the latter part of the chapter provides a useful look at cognitive models of discourse based on Fauconnier and Turner’s (2002) blending theory, and provides a concise illustration of its application in analyzing – and attempting to explain the efficacy of – rhetoric from Hitler’s Mein Kampf. Indeed, a large impetus for the chapter is an important goal for any analyst to keep in mind: the need to take ‘an explanatory stance rather than a merely descriptive one’ (p. 24).

In ‘Critical discourse analysis in transdisciplinary research’, Norman Fairclough stresses a model of ‘transdisciplinary’ research where the aim is not just the integration of diverse resources from other disciplines into CDA (i.e. ‘interdisciplinary’ research), but a dialogue between CDA and those disciplines that leads to the development of both (cf. Chiapello and Fairclough 2002). Throughout the chapter, Fairclough illustrates this transdisciplinary approach by continuing a dialogue between CDA and recent sociological theory – specifically, Jessop’s (2002) work on governance and the relationship between discourse and social processes. The theoretical ideas contained in such work form an important backdrop to CDA’s interest in understanding, for example, language in the ‘new capitalism’. In turn, CDA’s detailed account of the workings of discourse enhances theoretical ideas that link discourse to other aspects of the social. In particular, Fairclough develops the notion of ‘genre’ in a way that is not only useful to the
critical analysis of texts, but also to the broader theoretical understanding of ‘regimes of governance’.

In ‘Contextual knowledge management in discourse production: A CDA perspective’, Teun van Dijk examines ‘the way knowledge in discourse production and comprehension is managed as a function of context’ (p. 72). The key to the integration of knowledge into mental context models is what van Dijk terms the K-device, an active cognitive process that ‘calculates’ what interlocutors know during their interaction. The K-device effectively manages the development of the context model used in conversation. The importance of these ideas for CDA lies in their capacity to ‘critically examine not only what beliefs are taken for granted as knowledge, but also how this is done’ (p. 95).

In ‘Lighting the stove: Why habitus isn’t enough for Critical Discourse Analysis’, Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon argue for nexus analysis, ‘a research strategy which seeks to map out the multiple semiotic cycles which circulate through a moment of social action’ (p. 115). In essence, this approach aims to move beyond the simple statement that discourse is sedimented in habitus. Instead, the goal outlined by Scollon and Scollon is to describe how habitus arises – that is, ‘to more closely theorize just how discourse becomes action and action becomes discourse’ (p. 101). Their explication centers on the mundane example of internalizing the discourse involved in learning to light a camp stove. The simplicity of the example works well to highlight the key ideas from activity theory and sociocultural psychology that form the crux of their arguments. In the end we are left with an important step in the complex process of unraveling a discourse cycle.

Part II, ‘Implementing interdisciplinarity’, features studies that do just that, with a focus on discourses on European identities. The chapters in this section largely stem from ongoing research carried out in affiliation with the Research Center for Discourse, Politics, and Identity (DPI) at the University of Vienna. Ruth Wodak started DPI in 1997 with a three-fold focus on communication within organizations, the tension between national and supranational (e.g. EU) discourses of identity, and the issue of racism in Austria (DPI 2006). In ‘Analyzing European Union discourses: Theories and applications’, Ruth Wodak and Gilbert Weiss sketch out an overview of DPI’s research. In particular, they address the complexity of analyzing EU institutional discourse in context, and stress a theoretical framework that takes into account issues of intertextuality, interdiscursivity, and recontextualization.

In “‘European identity wanted!” On discursive and communicative dimensions of the European Convention’, Michal Krzyżanowski examines the way institutional communication within plenary sessions of the European Convention takes place. Important is the way a ‘mainstream voice’ – i.e. a dominant set of visions about Europe – develops. In Chapter 8, ‘Deliberation or “mainstreaming”?: Empirically researching the European Convention’, Florian Oberhuber continues to explore the construction of a ‘mainstream’ position within discourses emanating from the European Convention. Specifically, Oberhuber provides a
critique of the ‘consensus’ procedure used during the convention whereby dissent is subtly frustrated among less powerful members in favor of quiet assent to the position of those with more power, an important condition that leads to the discursive realization of ‘mainstreaming’. The work in these papers moves toward an understanding of what is sometimes described as the ‘democratic deficit’ of the European Union. The structural conditions that lead to mainstreaming, as these researchers show, inhibit the intended process of deliberative democracy aimed for by the European Convention. In this way, the work provides an important critique that could potentially be taken up to improve the democratic process within EU institutions.

In “‘It is not sufficient to have a moral basis, it has to be democratic too’: Constructing “Europe” in Swedish media report on the Austrian political situation in 2000”, Christoph Barenreuter provides a particularly incisive look at the way discourses on national and European identities intertwine and influence each other. The chapter focuses on the case of EU reaction to participation of the racist and anti-Semitic Freedom Party in the Austrian government in early 2000. To understand the tension between national and supranational discourses, Barenreuter examines a corpus of articles taken from four major Swedish newspapers. His examination of the interplay between discourses on national identity and European identity found an ideal site in the Euro-skeptic Sweden, also a nation with a proud democratic tradition.

Chapter 10, ‘Language, psychotherapy and client change: An interdisciplinary perspective’, shifts abruptly from the topic of European discourses that make up the rest of Part II. Although the chapter seems out of place in this section, it nevertheless provides a fascinating example of Van Leeuwen’s integrationist model laid out in Chapter 1. In this chapter, Peter Muntigl and Adam Horvath incorporate Systemic Functional Linguistics and psychotherapy research. The goal is to better understand (and hence improve) psychotherapy by applying ‘rigorous and detailed attention’ to the way ‘language is actually used during therapy’ (p. 217).

Finally, Part III steps outside the starting point of linguistics and into the fields of anthropology and sociology to discuss the implementation of discourse analysis within these fields. In ‘Anthropology of institutions and discourse analysis: Looking into interdisciplinarity’, Irène Bellier asks, how do institutions think? The institutions she has in mind are specifically those of the UN and EU. In trying to understand ‘the complex relations between the content of the discourses, their conditions of production and their effects’ (p. 263), she provides a discussion that stresses the need for interdisciplinarity.

In ‘The role of a political identity code in defining the boundaries of public and private: The example of latent antisemitism’, András Kovács examines concealed anti-Semitism. The primary question examines where people draw the boundary between public and private communication, which determines whether they divulge or choose to keep latent anti-Semitic views. Kovács explains how anti-Semitism functions as a code in that ‘it draws a symbolic line between
politico-cultural camps, and is one of the most easily comprehended tools in the establishment of public political and cultural identity’ (p. 276).

In ‘Social order and disorder. Institutions, policy paradigms and discourses: An interdisciplinary approach’, Tom R. Burns and Marcus Carson set out to describe the discourses associated with different problem situations in institutions. Drawing upon ideas from Kuhn (1970) and others, the chapter outlines a typology of systemic problems and concomitant discourses in an effort to understand the way changes take place within institutions – and importantly, the way certain discourses accompany those changes. ‘In general, major paradigm adjustments, or even paradigm replacement, may be preceded by changes in the discourses as well as in the organization and practices of the institution’ (p. 292).

Overall, the focus on interdisciplinary research throughout this volume plays out in what may at times seem to be a disparate collection of ideas and topics. Yet this breadth of ideas, and especially the approaches discussed in the more theoretically oriented Part I, becomes the book’s strength. The diverse contributions provide a little something for everyone interested in forging new directions in (Critical) Discourse Analysis.

REFERENCES


DPI. 2006. Discourse, Politics and Identity Research Center, University of Vienna <http://gerda.univie.ac.at/diskurs-politik-identitaet/about.php>.


ADAM HODGES
Department of Linguistics
University of Colorado
Hellems 290, 295UCB
Boulder, CO 80309-295 U.S.A.
adam.hodges@colorado.edu


Reviewed by M. AGNES KANG