

Book review: The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis, by Michael Handford and James Paul Gee (2023)

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Discourse analysis, defined as a study of language units, contributing to the social sciences, literally involves above the level of a sentence to create meaning, to constitute coherence, and to accomplish various social messages. The book explores the major notions and approaches of multimodal discourse analysis such as communication and cultural studies, critical discourse analysis, applied linguistics, and social psychology accompanied with their implications in different educational settings. Regarding the nature of discourse analysis as an interdisciplinary approach, various academic backgrounds and disciplines can be traced back in this field.

The handbook is divided into 8 sections which are written by contribution of prominent researchers and linguists with their main focus on the application of discourse analysis in different settings to encounter real-life problems, so that the contributors introduce the readers to a topic and encourage them to analyze authentic data. Compared to the first edition of the book, this collection contains 42 chapters in 8 sections, with 9 new chapters and 33 completely revised ones. Approaches to discourse analysis, gender, race, narrativity, genre, spoken discourse, social media, educational settings and institutional applications were the revised chapters, while, the added sections are gender, race, followed by sexualities, social media and online discourse respectively.

Regarding the content of the book, the Introduction to the issue was written by James Paul Gee and Michael Handford. They proposed the claims on the topic at a fundamental level to clarify form-function matching in language, its situated meaning and its main function in communication. Since the vital significance of discourse analysis is in its meaning-making through speaking and written discourse, this section mentioned the mutual processes of shaping, producing, and reproducing the messages through language use and the world to form human communication in turn.

Part I entitled 'Approaches to discourse analyses' includes 12 chapters or better to say articles on different perspectives on the issue written by various scholars. Firstly, critical discourse analysis was introduced by Fairclough, then the interplay between discourse analysis and

evaluation was examined by van Leeuwen and Han. Shi-xu studied on culturalist approach to discourse. Different versions of discourse including conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, its relationship with linguistic anthropology, and also, multimodal discourse analysis was separately investigated by Clayman and Gill, Jaspers, Richland, and Kress respectively. Moreover, discursive psychology proposed by Huma and Potter connects the discourse to psychology and discourse-oriented ethnography by Smart was the other interdisciplinary attempt in this part. To generalize the findings, corpus-based discourse analysis by Flowerdew was brought, while some linguistic-oriented topics such as systemic functional linguistics by Schleppegrell and Oteiza was mentioned to explore meaning in language, also metaphor, taken as a view from extended theory of conceptual metaphor was one of the key topics of part 1 of the book.

Firstly, the part initiates with the definition of critical social analysis, with great emphasis on social realities to focus on material-semiotic relations. Furthermore, primary concepts, categories and relations pertaining to the critical discourse analysis were speculated in the first chapter. The concept of evaluation is the topic of the second chapter with a brief history on linguistic evaluation, system networks of appraisal, attitude, appreciation and judgment. The third chapter of this unit concerned on cultural discourse studies as an alternative mode of research, its self-appointed authority in ethics, intellectual preliminaries and interlinked assumptions. The following chapter introduced discursive psychology as a perspective at the boundary of psychology, communication, sociology and linguistics, rooted from discourse analysis, linguistic philosophy and post-structuralism.

Conversation analysis as the topic of the next chapter is referred to the study of human social interaction that extracts interactional conduct norms, and the reasoning methods to produce and recognize the action. Chapter 6 of this part focuses on interactional sociolinguistics as the language use of people in face-to-face interaction, originating from various linguistic disciplines including dialectology, pragmatics, conversation analysis, ethnomethodology, anthropology and sociology. Then, two widely practiced approaches of ethnography, naming 'Interpretive Ethnography' and 'Ethnography of Communication' were explained in the next chapter, while chapter 8 focuses on language and culture in preparing a programmatic review focusing on linguistic anthropology. Later, corpus-based analyses regarding academic discourse, corpus-based textual approach and lexical bundles of meta-discourse research were investigated in Chapter 9. Then, Chapter 10 studies on multimodal discourse analysis aiming at elaborating tools and providing insight into the meaning relation and following semiotic manifestations.

The discussion goes on systemic functional linguistics in Chapter 11 to offer an approach to explore meaning in language and then, to relate language use to social contexts by providing an overview of systemic theory of functional language. Moreover, it examines studies to explore meaning in different discourse in several contexts. Eventually, with the focus on the notion of metaphor, Chapter 12 discusses issues such as the main aspects and components constituting the metaphorical conceptualization; the functions of metaphors in natural discourse, followed by the multi-level nature of conceptual metaphors; the importance of context in metaphorical conceptualization of discourse; and an informal way to operationalize the theory of extended conceptual metaphor in producing metaphors in discourse (Kovecses, 2015).

Then, Part II focuses on gender, race and sexualities, their relationship with discourse analysis, professional communication and intersectionality. Firstly, two strands of research on language and gender with the discussion on male-female differences were elaborated in Chapter 13, then developing the theory as a “mesh of possibilities” featuring a perspective beyond binary thinking was proposed in the following chapter.

Following queer linguistics, discourse analysis and (anti)racist discourse were proposed in this part in great detail. Intersectionality in discourse analysis is the topic of Chapter 15 rooted in the field of gender, race and power, while the next chapter investigates the interplay between discourse and professional communication, through highlighting on the varieties in gendered discourses in different societies. A noticeable point in further orientation of chapter 16 refers to what Banyard, (2010) calls as the five ‘Cs’, “where women in countries worldwide dominate *cleaning, caring, clerical work, cashiering and catering*, all low-paid professions with minimal status” (239).

Chapter 17 examines racism and ethnicism as primary forms of domination and inequality in society, with an emphasis on the role of political discourse as a fundamental element in reproducing racism on the racist discourse of white elite features which can be seen in the media, politics and even in educational settings.

Linguistics including Thornborrow, Olson, and Tan contributed in providing Part III, entitled ‘Narrativity and Discourse’ by highlighting on issues of narrative analysis, literary discourse, as well as narrative, cognition and rationality. Firstly, Chapter 17 discusses theoretical narrative analysis of the fields including interactional sociolinguistics, discourse pragmatics and conversational discourse analysis. Accordingly, analyzing narrative as a discursive activity is discussed in the following chapter, while, Chapter 19 investigates literary discourse, its nature, history and contexts. More importantly, Chapter 20 discusses rationality as a native endowment, a privileged part of human sciences and a universal feature by adopting cognitive psychology and a discourse model of reasoning.

Moving forward, Part IV of the book refers to the concepts of genre and register, the relationship between genre and discourse analysis was proposed by Biber, by examining genre, register and discourse in systemic functional linguistic studies. Chapter 21 of the book focused on the description of a register including three main components of the situational context, the typical features of linguistics, and the functional relationships existing between these components (Biber & Conrad, 2019). Besides, the essential characteristics of corpus-based discourse analysis and multi-dimensional studies of register variations were scrutinized afterwards in this chapter. Then, by focusing on genres in education, Chapter 22 outlines the meaning theory to underpin the genre-based approach, and to illustrate some methods of educational discourse analysis. It is worthy of noticing that figure 22.1 of this chapter clearly shows the relationship between genre, register and meta-functions of language, while figure 24.1 illustrates the multidimensional view of professional discourse.

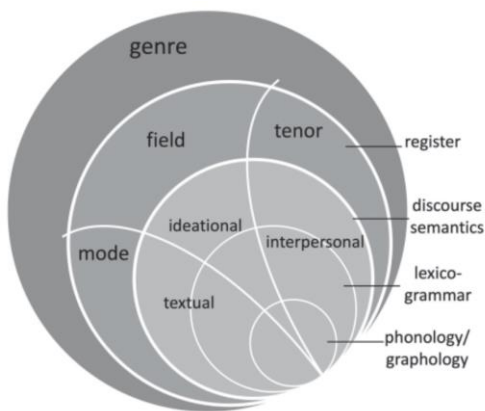


Figure 22.1 Genre, register and metafunctions of language

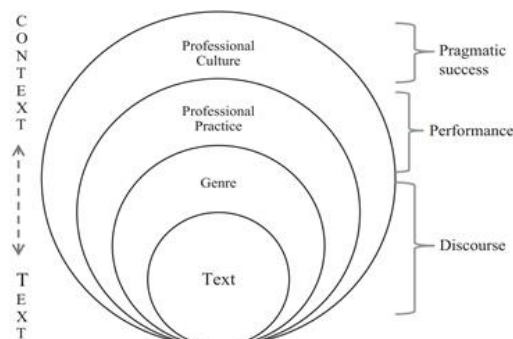


Figure 24.1 Multidimensional view of professional discourse

More extensively, the book goes forward to bring what Bazerman studied on genre resembling as a social action and Bhatia on critical genre analysis of professional discourse. In principle, Chapter 23 claims that language as a crafted, deployed, and interpreted production of social interactions with their clear implications for the analysis of discourse by people to express their identities. Finally, chapter 24 of this book is an endeavor to widen the realm of the professional genre analysis beyond the traditional existing concerns regarding formal and functional linguistics in order to various levels of critical consideration of generic resources, such as genre appropriations, professional genre practices, as well as typical disciplinary conventions of the issue.

Part V of the book particularly accentuates on spoken discourse, initiating to introduce the framework of discourse intonation and describe the functions of discourse intonation systems of prominence, tone, key and termination in local contexts with the purpose of adding communicative value to speaking in chapter 25. Later, in chapter 26, McCarthy and Buttery investigated lexis in spoken discourse, claiming the significance of lexical chunks and patterning in spoken discourse highlighted by the high frequency of interactively meaningful items. Following, the discussion goes on by Hopper's work on emergent grammar as a move from description to exemplification of the ongoing structure of language in chapter 27 to rethink the relationship between grammar and texts from a linguistic perspective.

Part VI collects works on social media and online discourse by analysts including Jones, Georgakopoulou, Vasquez and Liska. They focused on more updated issues of social media, online stories as the intersection between affordances and practices, and online identity. This part initiated with challenges of social media about discourse analysis in Chapter 28, such as various types of 'hidden semiotics' that affect the texts interactions with social media; the material dimensions of using social media; and the discursive effect dimensions on social media platforms. Then, the intersection of affordances and associated practices were discussed as instrumental of storytelling platform in Chapter 29. The noticeable point of this chapter was its complicated, rather abstruse language implemented in this chapter which denotes the complexity and enterprising nature of the topic as well. Chapter 30 examines changing conceptualizations of cyber identity in online environments interactions regarding both practical and ethical issues.

The next part of the book, Part VII focuses on various aspects of educational applications

and discourse with topics including the ‘New Literacy Studies, Ethnography, Bilingualism and Classroom Discourse’. Finally, the relationship between English for academic purposes and discourse analysis was scrutinized in this part.

Firstly, in this part, Chapter 31 studies the new literacy studies proposed by eminent linguists, historians, and cultural psychologists who took a serious interest in reach for some educational challenges and issues. Ethnography and its relationship with classroom discourse accompanied with a discussion of the major emergent themes to address and the existing challenges were the dominant topics of Chapter 32. Going ahead, Chapter 33 focuses on education and bilingualism to provide an overview of empirical studies among bilingual people, expanded to English for academic purposes (EAP) proposed in Chapter 34, with a distinctive focus on the ways language is used in particular academic contexts. This chapter depicts the central role of discourse analysis by offering an overview of its importance, outlining some contributions and predictions about future research directions.

The final part of this book is part VIII with the emphasis on institutional applications of discourse with a special look on in advertising, news media and even in the language of the law and humor in workplaces. Moving forward, Ruth Wodak and Nicolina M. Montessori conducted some research on political discourse in action and critical policy discourse analysis respectively. The concluding part of this unit examined the intercultural discourse by exploring identity perspectives on business interaction. Chapter 35 focuses on advertising discourse, its definition, brands and dialogic relationships in advertisements, while Chapter 36 highlights news discourse, characterized by a high degree of stability in content.

More practically, the relationship between discourse and health is the topic of chapter 37 referring to all contributing aspects and modes of communication in medical contexts which are related to health and illness. Then, taking a more social view on the communication between the law and people, certain aspects of legal language discourse were discussed in chapter 38 of the book by analyzing some excerpts and with the purpose of examining various genres and registers of court, legal obligations and jury instructions.

Chapter 39 discusses a livelier aspect of social discourse which can be referred to ethnicity and humor in workplace by bringing two categories of ethnic humor, naming solidarity-building humor and boundary-marking humor. The other issue is investigating specific norms and rules of political discourse as an integrative-interdisciplinary approach with its official genres to demonstrate politicians for the as the topic of chapter 40. It leads to critical policy discourse analysis in chapter 41 to investigate underlying major interests, values, typical and normative assumptions in the meaning-making processes and policy making implementation. The final chapter of this book refers to intercultural discourse and identity perspectives regarding business interactions to argue on co-existence of multiple, multi-faceted cultural identities and to examine their dynamic negotiation and co-construction.

Overall, despite common interests in the production of an academic work backed by a unique holistic perspective, this book benefits from the voices, views and findings of a plethora of authors, who are leading figures and distinguished scholars on discourse analysis. This resulted in a comprehensive handbook covering multi-layered and multi-faceted notions involving in the field.

The authors tried to broaden the extent of the topic to define it as studying language in the context of society, history, gender, culture, instructional contexts, identity formation, culture, power, and politics to create meaning-relevant and purposeful language use, because they believed utterances are of main parts of social life, and they should be understood with regard to all the dimensions of life. It is noteworthy to note that the book tries to keep a balance on the orientations taken by both bringing an organized review of the main concepts of each chapter as well as taking a forward look on the further developments and potential forthcoming challenges. In broad term, the studies reviewed and brought in this book have provided a clear understanding of the micro processes in the discourse analysis which are interconnected with the macro processes beyond the limited instructional context including politics, culture, power and even economy.

Looking at the organization, content and layout of this book, one may notice that the chapters are abundant with real data including scripts and extract collected from different countries and various people, brought in different fonts and separated structure, which adds to the validity of the claims proposed therein. Moreover, most chapters are supported by appendix as the referring final part and some illustrations to help readers better understand the topics discussed.

More interestingly, the chapters contain expository analysis of real data, so that readers can see how the tools of analyzing discourse can be implemented on each particular type of data. It is facilitated and accompanied with 'Further Readings' at the end of each chapter to encourage the motivated readers to explore the topic more elaborately. The foregoing account of critical discourse analysis, as illustrated through analyzing different constituting areas of the issue is a quest for increasingly insightful and detailed description which is achieved in various chapters of this book.

The starting point of the book can be its using fresh terminology, vivid image of the concepts and reader-friendly style of writing. To look beyond the text and content of the book within the multi-perspective framework, the first distinguishing feature is its surrounding scopes, which seem to be part of the holistic discourse. Constructing an extensive, yet cohesive structure of a giant field like discourse analysis requires a consistent team of linguists, analysts and researchers to create an updated integrity of concepts, notions and data to be explore and analyzed meticulously.

The authors academically and professionally tried to follow unbiased, impartial and fair view regarding women, black communities, minorities or migrants. The direct referring to Covid-19 pandemic as one of greatest cascade of crises (p.39) in the world implied the realistic perspective of the authors to the global controversies. More importantly, frequent speculations of discourse data from platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram denotes the authors' significance on the latest modern innovations and concerns as well.

On the other hand, regarding the potential drawbacks of the book, as the authors mentioned, is the issue of categorizing; as certain chapters can be more prototypical of a category, while other groupings are possible as well. Moreover, some chapters can fit in two or even three categories. For instance, the article on professional genres is categorized in the 'Genre and register' section, while can also be grouped in the 'Institutional applications' section as well. Additionally, the discussion on 'new media in Institutional applications' can be appeared in 'Genre and register'. In this regard, the author advised readers to consider the categorizations as a guide to explore the relevant issues on the topic relatively easier.

The other noticeable shortcoming of some chapters of this book is their frequent use of updated references, in spite of their impeccable role in the orientation of the issue, more updated and contemporary sources can add to the value and generalizability of the claims.

In the end, discourse analysis matters significantly because discourse itself matters in the global system of social interaction. The book basically intended to reflect increasing relevance of society, culture, institutions, identity, power, and politics in contemporary world with the purpose of providing an analytic framework for describing, analyzing, explaining, interpreting, and evaluating discourse, encompassing various large-scale systems surrounding this phenomenon. Furthermore, one of the key features of the book can be its endeavor to critically engage with contemporary real-world issues, naming racism, corruption and inequity; as well as to demonstrate empirical evidence of emerging discourse and social practices on discourse analysis.

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