

From Text Grammar to Critical Discourse Analysis

A brief academic autobiography

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In this brief 'academic autobiography' I sketch some of the developments of my work from 'text grammar' in the early 1970s, to my present studies in 'Critical Discourse Analysis' (CDA), and other areas of investigation, such as the study of ideology, knowledge and context. The focus of this autobiography is on 'academic'. There are very few personal events mentioned in this text, some of which may explain some of the changes in my academic interests, such as my growing interest in racist and critical issues as from the 1980s. However, such a more personal story need to be told elsewhere.

Text Grammar

To understand my interest in text grammars it should be recalled that my first academic love was literary theory. After a first degree in French Language and Literature, with special interest in Surrealist poetry, at the (protestant) Free University of Amsterdam, I also studied Literary Theory, at the (City) University of Amsterdam. In that study I especially focused on literary language, and wanted to know whether literature could be characterized specifically by its typical use of language.

Under the influence of Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Grammar, such a question at the end of the 1960s was phrased in terms of a special set of rules that would 'generate' (that is, structurally describe) literary texts. However, TG-Grammar never was developed to account for *text* structures, and thus my aim to develop a 'generative poetics', reflected in my first book publications in Dutch (Van Dijk, 1971a, 1971b – some of which was later translated into German and Italian; see the References below for details), was soon replaced by the more important aim to focus on a 'generative text grammar.' This would become the topic of my PhD dissertation (Van Dijk, 1972).

The point of such text grammars was to be able to provide an explicit description of the (grammatical) structures of texts. The most obvious task of such a description was to account for (semantic) coherence relations between sentences, among other fundamental aspects of discourse. Although also sentence grammars need to make explicit how clauses of complex sentences are semantically related, there was no serious research then that could be extended to a linear (sequential) semantics of discourse.

Under the influence of French structural semantics (Greimas), I therefore first assumed that meaning relations between sentences had to be defined in terms of the identity of the ‘lexemes’ or ‘semes’ of the words in such sentences. This assumption later turned out to be totally misguided, although it remained popular in French structural semantics for years.

The point is that it is not only meaning relations between sentences that define coherence, but rather *referential* relations, that is, relations between the ‘things’ the sentences in a text denote, as we shall see below.

New and interesting in this emerging theory of text grammar was the introduction of ‘macrostructures’, a notion unknown in any form of sentence grammar. The point of macrostructures is that texts not only have local or microstructural relations between subsequent sentences, but that they also have overall structures that define their global coherence and organization. In my early work, such macrostructures were of two different kinds, viz., global structures of *meaning*, and global structures of *form*. To avoid confusion between these different kind of ‘global’ structures, I later introduced the notion of ‘superstructure’ to refer to the latter structures, that is, the abstract, schematic structures that organize the overall *form* or *format* of the text, as we know them from the theory of narrative or the theory of argumentation (Van Dijk, 1980).

One should ask after more than 30 years whether these text grammars were wrong or right. As I see it now, I would say that the basic *principles* of text grammar are still sound today, as is obvious from the large body of work still being done in many types of sometimes highly sophisticated discourse grammars. Indeed, in the same way as a sentence grammar explains why arbitrary sequences of words do not define sentences, a text grammar needs to account for the fact that arbitrary sequences of sentences do not define a text.

However, the way we actually did text grammar then was still very primitive, and largely speculative, imprecise, and partly misguided. What remained though was the importance of the notion of coherence in any semantic theory of discourse, and the obvious idea that texts also are organized at more global, overall levels of description.

Later studies, also in psychology, about such local (intersentential) and global (textual) coherence proved to be more sophisticated. Thus, in my book *Text and Context* (Van Dijk, 1977), I emphasized that local coherence between sentences should be based on referential relations between ‘facts in a possible world’, thereby using the then popular notion of ‘possible world’ from formal semantics and philosophy. That is, two subsequent propositions P1 and P2 are coherent if they denote two facts F1 and F2 that are (for instance conditionally, or causally) related in some possible world, or in some model representing a situation of such a possible world. Until today, this is the standard (formal) semantic definition of discourse coherence – although pragmatic and cognitive parameters need to be added to this kind of definition: discourses are obviously not coherent in the abstract, but coherent-for-discourse-participants-in-some-communicative-situation. In my later work with Walter Kintsch on the psychology of text processing, this referential relation was not defined in terms of facts ‘in some possible world’, but in terms of *mental* models (see below).

Another dimension of local coherence however showed up. Sentences (or their meanings: propositions) not only cohere because of the relations between the facts they denote, but also because of relations between their meanings themselves. In other terms: Coherence not only was ‘extensional’, but also ‘intensional’. However, this meaning relation was not defined in terms of the meanings of isolated words (as in structuralist semantics) but in

terms of the relations between *whole propositions*. For instance, two propositions P1 and P2 are intensionally coherent if P2 is a Generalization, a Specification, an Explanation or an Example of P1. That is, these notions define a *functional* relation between subsequent propositions: P2 has the function of being a Generalization of P1, etc. Later work in Mann & Thompson's Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) further develops this type of functional relations between the sentences of texts. Unfortunately they sometimes confuse them with the *referential* relations between propositions, that is, the relations based on the (temporal, conditional, causal, etc.) relations between the *facts* denoted by propositions. It is very important to distinguish these two kinds of coherence, that is, functional (intensional, meaning-based) coherence, on the one hand, and referential (extensional, reference-based) coherence, on the other hand.

At the same time, the notion of macrostructure was now specifically defined in terms of rather precise semantic rules for the derivation of macropropositions from sequences of micropropositions. In this way, we have a formal account of the familiar phenomenon of 'summarizing' a text. In the psychology of text processing, these macrostructures later played a fundamental role in accounting for the way language users understand, store and recall texts.

It is therefore strange that even today there are discourse grammars that only operate at the 'linear' level of subsequent sentences or propositions, and ignore the crucial global structures (macrostructures, superstructures) that define the overall meaning and form of texts.

One major reason for this ignorance is probably the fact that macrostructures are still strange objects in grammatical theory, structures that need a different account from the structures of the meaning of sentences or

relations between sentences. Indeed, one can hardly imagine an account of, for instance, narrative, argumentative or conversational structures on the basis of grammar alone. In this sense, mainstream modern linguistics itself never developed a proper discourse-based theory of language use, because its grammars remained essentially sentence or 'sequence' grammars. The same is true for much psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. This is also one of the reasons why discourse analysis became a separate cross-discipline, instead of a specialization of linguistics. This development also shows how findings in one (sub) discipline may take decades before they are introduced and accepted in other (sub) disciplines, or even not introduced at all because they are found to be 'Fremdkörper' in a discipline.

The psychology of text processing

Precisely because my linguistic colleagues, even in text grammar, did not feel very comfortable with strange notions such as 'macrostructures', I turned to psychology for inspiration and support, and thus encountered Walter Kintsch. This American psychologist of Austrian descent, had written a book in 1974 (*The Representation of Meaning in Memory*) that for the first time in psychology explicitly stated that the object of study for a cognitive psychology of understanding no longer should be isolated sentences, but whole texts. He thereby referred to my 1972 doctoral dissertation on text grammar. We soon took up contact, and for more than 10 years -- and while I was writing my *Text and Context* (Van Dijk, 1977) book, and various articles on the pragmatics of discourse (Van Dijk, 1981), as well as various books in Dutch (Van Dijk, 1977, 1978, a, b) -- we thus worked together on several articles, and finally produced a book *Strategies of discourse comprehension*

that would have a tremendous influence in the psychology of discourse (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

Many of the original ideas on text grammar, including the elusive macrostructures, found their way in the cognitive theory of text comprehension. However, whereas in the beginning the mental processes and representations involved in processing were still too close to the structures and rules of text grammars, Kintsch and I later discovered that actual language use is much more flexible and at the same time more fallible: People make mistakes when talking or when listening to discourse.

Thus, the important notion of *strategic* understanding was introduced, which tried to account more realistically for what language users actually do when they speak or understand discourse. For instance, a grammar assigns a structure to a sentence or sequences of sentences that is already (abstractly) 'given', but real language users already start with the (tentative) interpretation of the first words a sentence before it has been fully heard or read. That is, understanding is 'on line' or linear and not 'post hoc'. Such strategic understanding is very fast and effective, but it is hypothetical: mistakes may be repaired later.

Also unlike grammars, language users may use information from both text and context at the same time, or operate at several text levels (phonology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics) at the same time in order to interpret the text. In sum, actual text processing is very different from formal, structural text analysis.

The same is true in discourse *production*: Language users already may start to speak or write without a fully developed structure of sentences, paragraphs, turns or whole discourses 'in mind'.

Language users represent sentences and their meanings in memory. That is, a psychological theory is a theory of mental processing, and needs to take into account that for instance our ‘working memory’, that is, Short Term Memory (STM) has limited capacity, and needs to be emptied regularly, after which its interpreted information is stored in Long Term Memory (LTM). Thus, for all levels of discourse, Kintsch and I described the strategies involved in their analysis, interpretation and storage in memory. Instead of conditions or rules for local coherence or the derivation of macrostructures, we now had effective strategies for their manipulation in the minds of the language users.

The result of such a process of understanding is a Text Representation in Episodic Memory, that is, the part of LTM where people’s personal experiences are stored. The notion of macrostructure plays a fundamental role in this process and representation: It is a structure construed by the language user in order to organize a text representation in memory. In other words, macrostructures in a psychological theory are subjective: They explain how language users understand what is most important in a text, that is, what its topics are, and how language users are able to summarize discourse.

Another crucial element, lacking in text grammar, needed to be introduced, viz., *knowledge*. In order to understand a text, vast amounts of social-cultural ‘world’ knowledge needs to be presupposed. It is impossible to define coherence relations between sentences, or indeed to construct macrostructures, without such knowledge. About the same time (in 1977), Schank and Abelson published their famous book about ‘scripts’, taken as the abstract ways people organize their knowledge about stereotypical events such as shopping or eating in a restaurant. In other words, in order to understand a text, language users activate one or more scripts, and use the

relevant information in the construction of a Text Representation in Episodic Memory.

Models

Kintsch and I introduced another crucial notion, viz., that of a (situation) *model*, a notion that was also used, though in a different way, by the psycholinguist Johnson-Laird in his books *Mental Models* (1983). The point of that notion is that language users do not merely construct a (semantic) representation of the text in their episodic memory, but also a representation of the event or situation the text is *about*. This notion of model proved to be very successful. It explained many things that hitherto were obscure or ignored:

First of all, it beautifully ‘grounded’ the theory of referential *coherence*: Sentences (or their propositions) were simply defined to be coherent relative to a model. That is, if people are able to construe a possible or plausible model for a sequence or a whole text, then the text is subjectively coherent. This also resolves the problem of ‘extralinguistic’ reference in linguistics and discourse analysis: It is not so much the ‘real world’ people are referring to or talking about, but the (inter)subjective (re)construction of the world, or a situation in the world, in terms of their mental models. That is, we thus have a cognitive and subjective, and hence more realistic, basis for the notion of ‘referential coherence’ that was earlier defined more abstractly in terms of formal models or possible worlds.

Secondly, *macrostructures* of texts can be explained in terms of the higher level ‘macrostructures’ of models: They may not be directly visible or expressed in the discourse itself, but the fact that people know what its general topics are is represented in their mental model of an event. In other words, implicit information and inferences in discourse processing are represented in mental models, which thus also nicely explain the notion of *presupposition*, namely as the propositions in a model that are not expressed in discourse.

Thirdly, models also provide an elegant explanation for the fact that when people recall a text, they will usually ‘falsely’ *recall* information that never was expressed in the original text at all. However, if we assume that people during understanding also construct a model of an event, and if much of the information in such a model may be derived from more general, sociocultural knowledge, then these ‘false’ recalls can be explained in terms of the contents of the model constructed for a text. *That is, what people remember of a text is not so much its meaning, as rather the subjective model they build about the event the text is about.* This is of course trivial when we realize that most readers are interested not so much in the abstract meaning of a text, but in information about ‘reality’. *In sum: Understanding a text means that people are able to construct a mental model for the text.*

Fourthly, in text *production*, the model is the starting-point for all processing – something that other theories of language and discourse production lack: People know something about an event, and this knowledge is represented in their model of the event, and this model will serve as the basis for, e.g., telling a story about the event or writing a news report about it.

Fifthly, models account for the fact that people not only represent what they ‘know’ about an event, but also for their *opinions* and *emotions*

associated with such an event. This explains how lexical choice and other aspects of 'appraisal' is rooted in the ways evaluative beliefs are represented in their mental models of events.

Finally, models explain how general *knowledge* is related to text processing: Whereas models are personal, subjective and ad hoc (tied to the present context of understanding), knowledge may be seen as a generalization and abstraction from such models. Learning-from-one's-experiences, thus, is typically an operation on models. Conversely, general knowledge is used by 'instantiating' fragments of such knowledge in specific models. Many later experiments in cognitive psychology confirmed that models indeed play a crucial role in understanding and recall.

What the book with Kintsch did not deal with is that besides models of events talked or written *about* (models one might also call 'semantic' models), language users also build models of the communicative event *in* which they participate. These so-called 'context models' (or 'pragmatic models') feature subjective representations of Self, the other speech participants, the Setting (Time and Place), social characteristics and relations between the participants and overall aims, purposes and goals.

Context models also form the mental basis of context-dependent speech acts, style and rhetoric. That is, they control the ways information from event models is selected and eventually expressed in discourse.

Whereas the earlier notion of mental (situation) model became very popular in psychology, it is surprising that the equally crucial notion of context model as yet has had little influence in the psychology of discourse processing. This is especially also strange since it explains many problems in a more realistic theory of discourse processing and language use, namely how people are able to speak and write adequately in a communicative situation.

Without context models, a theory of discourse processing in fact models what a single speaker or writer does, without any social 'input' as a result of communication and interaction with other participants. Without context models, thus, theories of discourse lack the important social and interactional dimension. In fact, I assume that much of what Kintsch and I earlier called the 'control system' is in fact carried out by context models.

This notion of 'context models' will later developed in more detail, towards the end of the 1990s, and fully worked out in my multidisciplinary book on context, now (in 2004-2005) in preparation. In that new context theory it is also explained how language users manage the fundamental task of adapting their discourses to the assumed knowledge of the recipients: Since they are unable to represent everything recipients know in such relatively small and strategic context models, they need simple strategies that allow them to conclude what recipients probably know already. Crucial in this case is the definition of knowledge as shared beliefs of a community (see below).

Whereas in this cognitive work on discourse the main focus is on individual processing, and only limited attention was paid to general, abstract and socially shared cognitive representations (such as knowledge) my later work on ideology (see below) further assumed that models -- and therefore the discourse based on them -- also feature evaluative beliefs, that is, *opinions* about social and communicative events. These opinions are partly personal, and partly based on socially shared opinion-structures, such as attitudes and ideologies. Much of my work during the 1980s, including the work on prejudices, focused on these social 'social cognitions' underlying text processing.

Discourse pragmatics

Unlike many other researchers, I have a rather restricted conception of pragmatics, namely, as the study of speech acts and speech act sequences. Whereas syntax has to do with *forms*, semantics with *meanings* and *reference*, pragmatics has to do with *action*. And whereas syntax provides rules of well-formedness, and semantics the conditions of meaningfulness, reference and coherence, pragmatics formulates the conditions of *appropriateness* of utterances defined as (speech) acts. That is, pragmatics is not the general study of the ‘use’ of language (or --as Charles Morris had put it nearly 60 years ago-- as the study of the relations between ‘signs’ and their users). If that would be the case, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics and discourse analysis would all be part of ‘pragmatics’. This would be a rather useless extension of the scope of pragmatics. The same is true for the study of specific interactional strategies, such as those of politeness or impression management. These are part of a theory of (conversational) interaction, and not of a theory of pragmatics.

My studies on pragmatics naturally focused on the pragmatics of *discourse*, and not on the pragmatics of isolated sentences (Van Dijk, 1981). Interestingly, the theory of semantic coherence could be used as an example for a theory of *pragmatic coherence* of sequences of speech acts: the speech acts A1 and A2 are coherent if A1 is a possible condition for the appropriate accomplishment of A2. Similarly, in the same way we may map sequences of propositions on macropropositions, we may map sequences of speech acts on overall, *macro speech acts*. For instance, pragmatically, a news report is a macro assertion, and a ransom note a macro threat. As is the case for the meaning of a discourse, this may also be what language users recall of a conversation-as-action: Not so much the detailed, local speech acts, but rather

the pragmatic ‘upshot’ or ‘point’ of a discourse, that is, its overall macro speech act: ‘He threatened me...’, ‘She promised me...’, etc.

The notion of macro speech act is systematically related to that of *semantic* macrostructures: The propositional ‘content’ of a macro speech act is typically a macroproposition. This nicely wraps up the theory of global structures, which now not only has a formal dimension (the schematic superstructure of a discourse), and a meaning dimension (its topics or macrostructure), but also a pragmatic dimension (the global speech act – and possibly other communicative acts – carried out by the discourse).

Discourse and racism

In 1980 my work took a rather different orientation. Also because of my first longer stay in a “Third World” country, viz., during a course I taught at the Colegio de Mexico, I finally decided it was time to do something serious. Text grammars, and psychological theories were fascinating areas of study, but – except from their obvious applications, for instance in education – they had very little to do with real problems in this world. The time was ripe to work on more social and political issues. One of these fundamental issues, especially in Europe, was *racism*. I thus became interested in the ways racism is expressed, reproduced or legitimated through text and talk.

Conversations

In several extensive projects, I thus systematically studied the ways white majorities think, speak and write about ethnic minorities, immigrants, refugees and about people from the South in general. One major project, for

instance, focused on how members of the majority group in the Netherlands and in California speak about the Others in everyday conversations. After recording, transcribing and analyzing hundreds of spontaneous interviews in various neighborhoods in Amsterdam and San Diego, my students and I soon found that at all levels of structure, such conversations are rather typical (Van Dijk, 1984, 1987).

For instance, at the level of topics, we found that, unlike in other conversations, only a very limited number of topics tend to come up when people talk about ‘foreigners’. Typically, such topics are about Cultural Differences, about Deviance (crime, violence, etc.), and about Threats (economic, social, cultural), thereby expressing and reproducing prevailing stereotypes and prejudices. At the local level of semantic relations between sentences, we found that people typically make use of specific semantic ‘moves’, such as the disclaimers of Apparent Denial (“I have nothing against Blacks, but...”) and Apparent Concession (“Not all Blacks are criminal, but...”). These moves seem to locally implement the overall conversational strategies of Positive Self-Presentation (We are not racist, we are tolerant, etc.), and Negative Other-Presentation (the negative part following the *but*). That the ‘positive’ part are largely forms of face-keeping, may be inferred from the fact that by far the largest part of the conversations are negative about ‘them’.

In an analysis of storytelling, we further found that the obligatory narrative category of the Resolution is often lacking in stories about immigrants. This seems to suggest that in their mental models of ethnic events, white people indeed do not actually *see* a ‘solution’ for the ‘foreigner-problem’. Stories thus focus on the (usually negative) Complication, and therefore in fact become complaint-stories that have a function in an

argument, in which the personal experiences of the story serve as the credible premises of negative conclusions such as “They do not want to adapt” or “They only come here to live off our pocket” , etc.

Style, rhetoric and other formal properties of these conversations complete this overall image. For instance, pronouns and demonstratives may be selectively used to enhance social distance, e.g., when speakers rather refer to their Turkish neighbors with the pronoun “them” or “those people” than referring to them, as would be normal, with the descriptive phrase “my (Turkish) neighbors”. In conversations we also found that people tend to hesitate, make errors or repairs when they have to name the Others, a breach of fluency that might be explained in terms of the (cognitive and social) face-keeping and impression management strategies at work in speaking about a ‘delicate’ topic such as minorities.

The Press

The other studies on the expression of ethnic prejudice and the reproduction of racism in discourse focused on institutional, elite text and talk. In one major project we analyzed many thousands of news reports in the British and the Dutch press (Van Dijk, 1991). What we wanted to know, first of all, is how mainstream newspapers write about the Others, and what role the press plays in ethnic relations, the propagation of stereotypes, and the reproduction of white dominance in general.

Interestingly, though not unexpectedly, many of the features of everyday conversations can also be observed in the press, and we may therefore assume that there are mutual relations between what the public at large says about ‘foreigners’ and what their newspapers say. For instance,

also in the press, the selection of main topics about minorities is restricted and stereotypical, if not negative. Again, we find the special focus on Difference, Deviance and Threat. Ethnic crime, also in the respectable and liberal press, is a major topic, as are the many problems associated with immigration. This means that the positive side of immigration (contributions to the economy, cultural variation, etc.) will seldom be topical in the press. Minorities are always portrayed as Problem People, whereas the problems ‘we’ cause for ‘them’, such as, lack of hospitality, harsh immigration laws, discrimination and racism, are seldom major topics.

Quotation patterns are similarly predictable. By its own rules of balance, one would expect the press to always quote also competent and credible minority spokespersons about ethnic events. Nothing is less true, however: Especially white (majority) institutions and elites are quoted. And when minorities are quoted, they are not allowed speak alone. This is especially the case when embarrassing topics such as discrimination or racism come up: If the Others are allowed to speak about that, it is always marked as an unwarranted accusation, as “alleged” racism or as “racism” between quotation marks, and not as a fact.

These biased structures, which may also be observed in disclaimers, descriptions of minority actors, the structure of headlines, style and rhetoric, may be expected when we realize that the newsroom of most newspapers in Europe is still virtually ‘white’: Very few minority journalists work for major newspapers, and virtually never at the higher editorial levels. Similarly, minority organizations and spokespersons are found less credible, less ‘objective’, and therefore have less access to the press.

The conclusion from this large-scale research was therefore that although in some respects the press merely reflects what the politicians or the

general public are saying about minorities, they also have their own role and responsibility in ethnic affairs, especially because of their immense scope and power. Unlike a biased ordinary speaker in a conversation, a biased news report or editorial may have hundreds of thousands, and --as is the case for the British tabloids-- sometimes millions of readers, and therefore have a tremendous influence. In our research on everyday conversations, we frequently were able to observe this influence of the press (Van Dijk, 1987). This is why we concluded that the press in Europe plays a central role in maintaining (and sometimes aggravating) the 'ethnic status quo', if not in the reproduction of racism.

News as discourse

These studies of the role of the press in the reproduction of racism run parallel with another project in the 1980s, viz., a systematic study into the structures, production and reception of news in the press (Van Dijk, 1988a, 1998b). Strikingly, very little discourse analytical work had been done on this most pervasive form of written discourse in our everyday lives. In several theoretical and empirical studies, I thus tried to extend discourse analysis to one of its most obvious domains of application: mass communication research. I assumed that news discourse had a canonical structure or 'news schema' that organizes news reports, beginning with the well-known categories of the Headline and the Lead, together forming the higher level category of Summary (which we find in many discourse types, as for instance also in scholarly articles) followed by such categories as Recent Events, Previous Events, Context, History and Comments. I emphasized the fact that also news production is largely a form of text processing, namely, of the many

source texts (written or spoken) the journalists use when writing a news report. One of the empirical studies examined how in the world press one event (viz., the assassination of president-elect Bechir Gemayel of Lebanon in September 1982) was covered. Hundreds of stories in a large number of newspapers in many languages were systematically analyzed to see whether there are 'universals' of news reports, and/or whether news reports in different countries, languages, cultures and political systems would typically provide a different 'picture' of the event. One of our conclusions of this research was that news reports across the world, possibly under the influence of the format of the reports of international news agencies, were surprising similar despite different political and cultural contexts. Differences exist rather between the quality press and the tabloid, popular press within the same country.

Textbooks

Another important source for ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, of which millions of children are the daily victims, are textbooks at school. We therefore analyzed social science textbooks from secondary schools in the Netherlands, and posed the same questions as in the other projects: What do they say about minorities, and what is their role in the reproduction of prejudice and racism (Van Dijk, 1987).

Although, especially in the USA, the situation is slowly improving with the introduction of more 'multicultural' learning materials, most textbooks, especially in Europe, continue either to ignore minorities altogether (thus implying that Europe --and the classrooms -- are still homogeneously 'white'), or tend to confirm simple stereotypes or even racist prejudices.

Minorities as well as people of the South in general, are thus represented not only as 'poor', 'backward', or 'primitive', but also as criminal and aggressive, as also is the case in the media and everyday conversations. Especially cultural 'deviance', viz., other habits, another language or another religion is focused upon and problematized. As is elsewhere the case in institutional and elite discourse on ethnic affairs, discrimination and racism are seldom topicalized, or even denied.

Parliamentary debates and other 'elite discourse'

Another major domain involved in the public discourse of ethnic affairs, is politics. We therefore analyzed the parliamentary debates about immigration, minorities or affirmative action, in the Netherlands, France, Germany, Great-Britain and the USA (Van Dijk, 1993). Obviously, such public, official discourse is seldom openly racist, with the exception of the statements of members of extremist right-wing parties. However, in a more indirect and subtle way, we find many of the typical features of 'foreigner-talk' we also found in the media and textbooks.

Especially interesting are the many strategic moves used to limit immigration or the rights of minorities. Blaming the victim is a major move: Minorities are blamed for their own marginal position, their lack of work and housing, and so on. It is suggested that it is 'better for them' if they stay in their own country so that they can 'build that up'. Rather cynically it may be added in such discourse that it would be better for 'them' if they would not be confronted with the racism in the poor neighborhoods where they would have to live. And of course, immigration and immigrants will primarily be

associated with financial, employment and housing problems, if not with crime drugs, and so on.

Corporate discourse

Given their role in employment and the labor market, also the discourse of corporate managers was studied, viz., on the basis of interviews with personnel managers (Van Dijk, 1993). As may be expected, corporate managers, like other white elites, will of course deny that in their company discrimination or racism takes place. At the same time, most of them, especially in the Netherlands, are adamantly opposed to any form of Affirmative Action (which they will call 'Reverse discrimination'). They may be concerned about minority unemployment (in Holland three or more times as high as majority unemployment), but they will always blame the Others: They don't speak our language, they have a different culture, they have insufficient education, they lack motivation, and so on. That other research shows that more than 60% of employers rather hire white men, than women or minority men, is obviously not part of their dominant explanations of minority unemployment. Neither is that the case in debates in politics and the media: If minorities have problems, they will somehow always be caused by themselves.

Elite discourse

As was shown also for academic discourse such as contemporary sociology handbooks, all these forms of dominant, majority discourses, and especially the various genres of elite discourse, show many resemblances. Besides the ideological prejudices and stereotypes, we thus find ‘textual’ stereotypes in the ways minorities and ethnic relations tend to be described. The major strategy in such text and talk, is that of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. ‘Our’ racism is systematically denied or at least mitigated, whereas ‘Their’ negative characteristics are focused upon and emphasized. If racism exists in ‘our’ society, then it should be sought for in the inner city ghettos, that is, among the poor whites, and never among the elites of the boardrooms, classrooms, newsrooms, or courtrooms. Elites tend to present themselves as tolerant and modern, while blaming the poor social victims. At the same time, populist politics will precisely (and ‘democratically’) refer to the resentment among the ‘people’ against further immigration. Nowhere is the denial of racism so routine as among the elites.

Also because of their role in decision making, teaching, research, employment, the bureaucracy, information and communication, the elites and their ethnic ideologies and practices have a tremendous impact on society. Although maybe seldom very overt and harsh, the elites often merely *preformulate* what will be soon accepted in (white) society at large. In other words, elites play a central role in the reproduction of racism. They are the ones that control public discourse, and since racism is primarily learned through such public discourse, the elites are primarily responsible for the reproduction of racism in society. This may also mean that they may be primary responsible for the reproduction of *antiracism* in society – and that strategies of resistance and change should focus on the ‘top’ (Van Dijk, 1993).

In the mid-1990s this research on political racism was further extended in a large project directed by my friend and colleague Ruth Wodak at the University of Vienna and myself, with the cooperation of a team of researchers in various countries, including Luisa Martín Rojo, Ineke van der Valk, Jessika Ter Wal, Lena Jones, Martin Reisigl, and Maria Sedlak. We collected parliamentary debates on immigration and other ethnic issues in seven western European countries (Austria, the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain) and systematically analyzed the contents and structures of such debates. We thus found how racism – and only seldom ‘antiracism’ -- was produced and reproduced ‘at the top’ society, and how politicians thus also give the bad example in society – apart from making vital decisions about the lives of immigrants and minorities (Wodak & Van Dijk, 2000).

Finally, after emigrating to Spain in 1999, I also paid more attention to racism in Spain and Latin America, and wrote a book on that topic (Van Dijk, 2003), and started an international project in Latin America with teams of seven countries studying discursive racism. The results of this project will hopefully be published in a book to appear in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

This research on racism in society also took an organizational dimension in the early 1990s, when a group of European scholars formed an International Association for the Study of Racism (IASR), with Laura Balbo (Italy) as President, and with me as General Secretary. Unfortunately, after several meetings of the board, lack of money, assistance and time forced this organization into a state of lethargy from which it has not yet been waken up.

The consequences of doing antiracist research

One other experience from this long-term research project on racism was that such critical research is not without consequences. Whereas in earlier research on text grammar I already had experienced – to say the least -- lack of interest among Dutch linguists, the study of racism was generally met with downright hostility in the Netherlands. Financial support for this kind of research was very hard, if not impossible to get, also for my assistants and PhD students working on this topic. The Dutch elites, not least the scholars and journalists, did not want to be ‘accused’ of racism – and further ignored the data that proved otherwise.

This attitude took an even more aggressive dimension when I pointed out that one of the major poets of the Netherlands, Gerrit Komrij, not only had published racist columns under his own name in the newspaper, but probably also was involved in a practical joke by publishing a racist, islamophobic pamphlet under a pseudonym. The complete Dutch press, journalists, commentators, columnists, etc. attacked me in this case, and nobody wanted to believe me, despite the numerous striking similarities between the racist pamphlet and the columns of the writer – who dragged me to court for slander, a case which however he lost: the judges were right when concluding that this famous writer, with his column in a major Dutch newspaper (*NRC-Handelsblad*), which incidentally had published the first installment of the racist pamphlet, could very well defend himself. Which he did: in several columns he attacked me virulently, ridiculing discourse studies, and trying to get me fired by the University of Amsterdam.

When years later I published a book on the whole affair (Van Dijk, 2003), with extensive arguments and demonstrations of the involvement of the famous writer in this affair, no publisher dared to publish the book, and

when I published the book on my own account, the press suddenly fell silent: despite its obviously burning topic, not a single book review of the book was published, so that the book was totally unknown and ignored by the public at large – selling hardly more than 150 copies.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Parallel to this vast and ongoing research project on discourse and racism, the early 1990s required extension of this work to the more general study of discourse, power and ideology. Thus, in various articles I examined the ways ‘access to (public) discourse’, e.g., that of the media, is distributed over various groups of people. I found that access to discourse is a scarce social resource for people, and that in general the elites may also be defined in terms of their preferential access to, if not control over public discourse. Such control may extend to the features of the context (Time, Place, Participants), as well as to the various features of the text (topics, style, and so on).

More generally, thus, I focused on the role of *power*, and how power is also discursively reproduced, enacted and legitimated in society. I emphasized that power is not only a way to control the acts of other people, but also their minds, and such mind control, which is again at the basis of action control, is largely discursive. In other words, discourse plays a fundamental role in the cycle of the reproduction of social power.

Against this background, and together with other researchers in discourse analysis and related disciplines, it was increasingly emphasized in the 1980s and 1990s that discourse analysis should also have a *critical* dimension. That is, in the choice of its orientation, topics, problems, issues

and methods, discourse analysis should actively participate, in its own academic way, in social debates, and do research that would serve those who need it most, rather than those who can pay most.

In various articles I stressed that CDA is not a theory or a method. Any adequate method may be used in CDA research. Rather, CDA is a *movement* of – theoretically very different -- scholars who focus on social issues and not primarily on academic paradigms. We typically study the many forms of (the abuse of) power in relations of gender, ethnicity and class, such as sexism and racism. We want to know how discourse enacts, expresses, condones or contributes to the reproduction of inequality. At the same time, we listen to the experiences and the opinions of dominated groups, and study the most effective ways of resistance and dissent.

Given this increasing interest in critical studies, I took the initiative to organize critical scholars in many countries into an international network called CRITICS (**C**enters for **R**esearch **I**nto **T**exts, **I**nformation and **C**ommunication in **S**ociety), with its own list on the internet (CRITICS-L).

A group of (mostly) European scholars has been meeting annually, since a first meeting I organized in Amsterdam in the early 1990s. We were thus able to stimulate the development of a more critical approach to the study of language, communication and discourse. Regular participants in these meetings were Lilie Chouliaraki (Copenhagen), Bessie Dendrinos (Athens), Norman Fairclough (Lancaster and now Bucharest), Gunther Kress (London), Luisa Martín Rojo (Madrid), Ron Scollon (Georgetown), Teun A. van Dijk (Amsterdam and later Barcelona), Theo van Leeuwen (London and later Cardiff), and Ruth Wodak (Vienna and now Lancaster), occasionally joined by others at the different locations in Europe where we met.

Already in 1990 I had founded the international journal *Discourse & Society* as a major forum for this more critical, social-political work. This journal soon became quite popular and prestigious, also because of its prominent place in the international citation hierarchy – it became the most cited journal in communication world wide, and even among the most cited in several other disciplines. After this, I founded another discourse journal, *Discourse Studies*, with a more general editorial policy.

Ideology

One of the central projects within the general orientation towards critical discourse studies is my study on ideology, initiated around 1995. In this project I could combine earlier ideas from the cognitive study of discourse, as developed in the project with Walter Kintsch, with later ideas on social cognition, power, racism, and the reproduction of power through discourse. That is, racist ideologies are not alone, and in order to explain their influence in society we need a more general theory of ideology. I therefore set up a large, long-term project in which the first study sketched the overall framework, based on the crucial notions of discourse, cognition and society (Van Dijk, 1998). In later projects I would then develop each partial theory, that is, the relations between ideology and social cognition, between ideology and society and finally between ideology and discourse.

The crucial concept of ideology I proposed is defined in terms of the fundamental cognitive beliefs that are at the basis of the social representations shared by the members of of a group. Thus, people may have ideological racist or sexist beliefs (e.g., about inequality) that are at the basis of racist and sexist prejudices shared by the members in their group, and that condition

their discourse and other social practices. We thus at the same time are able to link ideologies with discourse, and hence with the ways they are (discursively) reproduced, as well as the ways members of a group represent and reproduce their social position and conditions in their social cognitions and discourses. In other words, I thus presented a theory that also bridges the well-known cognition-society gap, and hence the micro-macro gap, that continues to plague the humanities and the social sciences. That is, ideologies control social representations of groups, and thus the social practices and discourses of their members. This happens through the ideological control of mental models which in turn, as we have seen above, control the meaning and the functions of discourses, interaction and communication. And conversely, ideologies may be 'learned' (and taught) through the generalization of mental models, that is, the personal experiences of social members. The theory thus accounts for all phases in the cycle that relates ideology with discourse and other social practices.

One of the major problems of a theory of ideology is the question of the internal 'structure' of ideologies: what indeed does an (anti)racist, (anti)sexist, socialist or neoliberal ideology look like? What exactly are its contents? Despite thousands of books on ideology, this and many other questions have never been answered explicitly. In my ideology project I postulate that ideologies, as many other cognitive representations, have a schematic organization, consisting of a number of fixed categories defining the 'identity' or self-image of a group, such as their actions, aims, norms, relations with other groups and resources. Another problem of the theory is its social basis: what kind of social groups typically develop ideologies? I hope to be able to deal with that question in a future book on ideology and society.

Knowledge

The next step in the mega-project on ideology was the theory of social cognition of which ideology was supposed to be part. However, this presupposes, among other things, a detailed theory of the relations between ideology and *knowledge*. However, when I started to write a book on ideology and social cognition, I soon found out despite the thousands of books on knowledge, that there is no general theory of knowledge. There is a traditional concept of knowledge in epistemology as ‘justified true beliefs’, but the debates on this notion were so arcane and so little related to what was known on knowledge in the social sciences – and even in common sense – that a new approach was needed.

In a number of papers, I thus started with a new, more pragmatic and more empirical, working definition of knowledge as the certified shared beliefs of (epistemic) communities, based on the (epistemic) criteria of the community which tell their members which beliefs are ‘accepted’ and shared as knowledge. This means that knowledge is systematically presupposed in the discourses of such a community, because all speakers know that all the other members already have such knowledge. This also provides a basis for a theory of context that explains how language users manage their discourses as a function of what they know recipients know already (see below).

Such a new theory of knowledge must also explain what kinds or *types* of knowledge there are. I therefore proposed a modest typology of knowledge, involving different criteria, such as social scope (personal knowledge, interpersonal knowledge, social group knowledge, national knowledge and cultural knowledge), abstract vs. concrete, general vs. specific, fictional vs. real, etc.

Finally, this theory also explains the relations between ideology and knowledge. Often, also in CDA, it is assumed that knowledge is ideologically based. This, however, is theoretically unsatisfactory. If all knowledge is ideologically based and hence different for each group in society, we would not have knowledge in common, across groups, and that would mean that we could not presuppose such common knowledge, and would not understand each other – which is not true.

That is, people may, for instance, have different opinions on abortion or immigration, but ideological debates presuppose that people of different ideological groups have knowledge in common: they know what immigration and abortion is. That is, not all knowledge is based on ideology, but all ideology is based on general, culturally shared knowledge, presupposed in all public discourses of such a community. *Within* groups however, people may have ideologically based knowledge – knowledge which others, outside the group, may well call ‘mere’ beliefs, opinions, prejudices or superstitions, as one may find about religious or racist ‘knowledge’.

This concept of knowledge makes it essentially *relative*: knowledge is defined relative to the communities in which it is ratified and shared. This also implies that knowledge may change – what earlier might just be beliefs of some scholars or social movements, may later become generally shared knowledge, and vice versa, what once was generally accepted belief, and hence knowledge (e.g. about God, or that the earth is flat), is now generally considered as a mere belief. Note though that also the relatively of knowledge is itself relative – as it should be – namely in the sense that *within* communities, knowledge is of course not relative at all: what we generally accept as knowledge is taken as the basis of all our discourse and interaction.

In my further work on knowledge, which should eventually result in a monograph on discourse and knowledge, I hope to further develop this theory of knowledge and show how discourse is produced and understood on the basis of knowledge. This also provides a broader, multidisciplinary basis, to the more limited psychological theory of knowledge so far used in the psychology of text processing, as well as the necessary building blocks for the sociocognitive theory of ideology.

Context

Finally, there is another notion that needed further theoretical development: *context*. More than 25 years ago, I wrote a book on text and context (Van Dijk, 1977), but in that book I talk much more about text than about context – which I reduced to some formal, pragmatic parameters, but did not investigate as such, let alone linked with a theory of discourse structures and contextualization.

Parallel to my work on ideology and knowledge, and sometimes closely related to it, I therefore conceived the idea to clarify the notion of context. The problem was that although there were thousands of books with the notion of ‘context’ in their titles, there was not a single monograph on context itself. Indeed, also in linguistics and discourse studies, the notion was generally used in a very informal sense, for instance as the situation or environment of discourse, social practices or other phenomena being studied.

However, this was theoretically unsatisfactory, especially because social contexts as such cannot influence text or talk. What we need is some kind of interface. And as we have seen before, such an interface between society and discourse needs to be cognitive: It is the way people *understand*

or *interpret* their social environment that constitutes the context of their discourse and social practices. Fortunately, we have an excellent theoretical and empirically sound notion to account for such subjective interpretations of events or situations: mental *models*. This is why I proposed that contexts be theorized in terms of special mental models in episodic memory: *context models*. These context models – or simply contexts – control all levels and aspects of discourse production and discourse understanding, such as their genre, forms, style, variation and in general how a discourse is adapted to the communicative situation.

Like other mental models, also context models consist of a limited number of categories, such as a Setting, Participants and Actions, with further subcategories such as Time, Place, Identities, Roles, Aims and Knowledge. Such a rather simple schematic structure allows language users to quickly analyze and define social situations on line and thus to control their discourse production as a function of their model (definition) of the communicative situation. Since context models are subjective, this also means that different participants may have different models of the current situation, and this may of course lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

Context models thus explain many issues in discourse and discourse processing. They form the missing links between society and contextually adequate discourse. They explain communication conflicts. They define what style is – discourse variation as a function of context models. And they explain how language users – and not situations – control discourse as a function of communicative situations.

One of the crucial components of context models is *knowledge*. Language users adapt what they say or write to what they believe or know the recipients know already. That is, they need a model of the knowledge of the

recipients and strategies of adapting their discourse to such a model. I therefore proposed in several papers to introduce a special device in context models, namely the K-device. This knowledge device has as its task to calculate at each point in the production of a discourse what recipients already know (in general, or because of earlier discourses, or because of the preceding part of the discourse), and hence to decide what knowledge to presuppose, assert or remind at this point in the discourse. Such strategies obviously are based on what each member shares with other members of epistemic communities. In this way, I was able to connect the project on knowledge with that on context. And since people not only share knowledge in communities, but also ideologies in social groups, something similar – an ideological device or I-device – may be postulated for the management of ideologically adequate (‘politically correct’) discourse within ideological groups.

In later work, I thus hope to integrate various ongoing projects, such as those on ideology, knowledge and context, because it has become obvious that such notions always need to be studied in their mutual relations: Text and talk is impossible without knowledge. It is impossible without contextual control and constraints. And much socially relevant discourse is ideological.

Hence, we need to understand how such different forms of socially shared or ‘distributed’ cognitions as knowledge and ideologies are related. How they further define and explain vague traditional notions such as attitudes and social representations. In other words, all these projects try to elucidate how discourse is related to social cognition and society, and within an overall critical perspective, in which theoretical advances are constantly influencing and inspired by critical work, for instance on racism, the media,

politics, textbooks, and other important social discourses that produce power and power abuse.

Contributions

Summarizing some of the contributions I have attempted to make with my work in the past decades, I might venture the following:

- Some aspects of literary semiotics.
- Some aspects of a generative theory of literature.
- The semantics of poetic language.
- The foundations of text grammar.
- Various aspects of text semantics, such as conditions of local and global coherence, theory of connectives, etc..
- The theory of macrostructures in discourse, cognition and action.
- The theory of discourse pragmatics, e.g., the notion of macro speech act.
- The theory of narrative.
- Various aspects of the theory of discourse processing, such as the theory of dynamic, strategic processing (with Walter Kintsch)
- The theory of mental models (with Walter Kintsch)
- The general foundations of a theory of discourse.

- The theory of elite racism.
- Many aspects of the theory, analysis and case studies of racist discourse.
- The social psychology of the discursive reproduction of prejudice and racism.
- The study of racism in the press.
- The study of racism in textbooks.
- The study of racism in everyday storytelling.
- The study of racism in political discourse (parliamentary debates).
- The theory of news discourse, e.g., of news schemata, news production, and comprehension.
- Case studies of news analysis, e.g., of international news.
- The study of social cognition and discourse.
- The foundations of critical discourse studies.
- The discursive study of power.
- The theory of ideology.
- Some aspects of a theory of knowledge and discourse.
- The theory of context, e.g., of context models.
- Publication of many books and articles on these topics.
- Many lectures and courses in many universities in many countries, but especially in Latin America.
- The foundation and editing of four international journals.
- The editing of two handbooks of discourse studies.
- Setting up and maintaining a personal website with resources for critical discourse studies.

- Contribution to the foundation of various international organizations, such as ALED, IASR, CRITICS, etc.

Conclusions

The academic itinerary and contributions sketched above, like all stories and accounts, also needs a conclusion, if not a moral. After more than 35 years of doing discourse analysis, one should have learned something about the discipline and its practitioners. One important point to emphasize is that despite the variety of the topics I studied, and the broad orientation of my work as a scholar, I have only a very limited grasp of what goes on nowadays, in many countries, in the now very vast field of discourse studies. There are several domains and directions of research I barely know. However, as a founder and editor of several international journals, first of *Poetics* and *TEXT*, and now of *Discourse & Society* and *Discourse Studies*, and as an editor of the *Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (1985) and another two-volume introduction, *Discourse Studies, An multidisciplinary contribution* (1997), I have always tried to promote, stimulate, integrate, unify and further develop the many different domains of studying text and talk, as one new cross-discipline of 'discourse studies'.

I thus have tried to bridge gaps, first between the study of language and literature, then between the grammar of sentences and discourses, as well as the theories of the relations between action and discourse, between discourse and cognition. and finally also between cognition and society. I have argued for a more social approach in the cognitive psychology of discourse processing, and for a more sociocognitive approach in critical, sociopolitical discourse studies. I have resisted and criticized the formation of schools and sects and instead propagated multidisciplinary, broadly based endeavors, against tendencies of reductionism. Discourse studies should be as theoretically explicit as diverse, integrating all relevant domains of

linguistics, pragmatics, psychology, communication studies and the other social social sciences.

Fortunately, through the journals and as author and editor of books I am able to influence this process a little bit, but obviously cannot do so alone. And whatever the theoretical and organizational endeavors, the ultimate aim is and should be a contribution to a critical analysis of society, including critical teaching of our students.

Another important conclusion is that my work represents several of many orientations, methods, theories, and directions of research. Emerging from French Structuralism in poetics and semiotics, it soon focused on modern linguistics, then on cognitive psychology and then the social sciences. There are many domains, methods, and approaches in discourse analysis, and I always have learned from all of them.

My aim has always been to be clear and pedagogical, and to avoid esoteric writing: The crucial criterion must always be that also our students, and not only the initiated, can read and understand our work. Obscure writing not only precludes understanding, but is inconsistent with the fundamental aims of critical discourse studies.

Much to the regret of some of my readers, I have avoided to remain in one domain, problem or paradigm, and always have changed fields in order to explore new ways and problems of doing discourse analysis. I may only hope that more people in discourse analysis would more often be 'foolish' enough to leave their current field in which they feel so well at home, and start to explore neighboring fields. It is precisely at the boundaries of fields and disciplines that new phenomena are observed and new theories developed.

As may be obvious from the account above, discourse analysis for me is essentially multidisciplinary. It involves linguistics, poetics, semiotics,

pragmatics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, and communication research. Because of multi-faceted nature of discourse, this multidisciplinary research should be integrated. We should devise theories that are complex and account both for the textual, the cognitive, the social, the political and the historical dimension of discourse. Indeed, a problem such as racism cannot be fully understood in light of only one discipline, or in terms of simple theories.

With the discipline as a whole, I have learned much about discourse during the last 35 years. And yet, at the same time I know that much of what we know is incomplete and misguided. I am not afraid to make mistakes, and see this as the inevitable problem of all new disciplines and original explorations of uncharted territories. If only we are willing to admit such errors later, when other research shows that and where we were wrong. Compared to the primitive ‘text grammars’ of the early 1970s, contemporary formal work on discourse structures is of course much more sophisticated. And compared to the simplistic cognitive, social and interactional models of text and talk of 20 years ago, new work on text processing, socio-political discourse studies and conversational analysis also has much advanced.

In the 40 years of modern discourse studies, many different discourse genres in many social domains have been studied: those in politics, the media, education, the law, and so on. Levels and dimensions, as well as analytical categories, have been multiplied, so that contemporary discourse analysis is incomparably more complex and empirically more precise than four decades ago. Whereas in the 1960s we were just a few in some disciplines interested in the study of discourse. Today, many thousands of scholars in many disciplines and in many countries yearly produce thousands of books and tens of thousands of articles on hundreds of topics and subdisciplines. Although seldom academically exercised in special departments or programs, discourse

studies has become a mature cross-discipline, with its own journals, handbooks, congresses and specializations.

Yet, there is still a lot to do. There are still fields that are underdeveloped (as is the case for the political science of discourse). And more importantly, we only now have begun to study discourse in the much more relevant framework of serious social issues, such as racism and sexism. In my view, the real value of discourse analysis as a discipline in society depends on its contributions to the solution of such problems.

Moral

Conventional stories end with a special category variously called ‘moral’, ‘coda’, ‘lesson’, and so on. This category features meanings that do not look back, but draw inferences of the story for today and tomorrow. Stories are to entertain, but often also to teach what we have learned from remarkable everyday experiences.

The preceding pages are not exactly a story. Yet they are about what I did in the past, and hence they are part of an intellectual life history. Since I also have learned from both my personal and my academic experiences, also this very succinct account of my scholarly activities of the last 35 years or so might feature some kind of *Moral*.

This Moral will not present Big and Wise Lessons of the Mature Scholar, but only a few modest comments on my way of doing and viewing scholarship in the areas in which I have been active. These comments are by definition very subjective and personal, and not at all intended either as recommendation to young scholars – simply because there are many legitimate, interesting and useful ways to do and view scholarship.

The students

In the preceding pages I have not mentioned the students, as if research had nothing to do with them. Let me therefore begin by emphasizing that they are crucial not only in the life of a teacher, but also in the work of an investigator. Many of the ideas I have presented here have first been formulated in the classroom. Dialogue and critical questions of more or less smart students are one of the best tests for scholarly ideas. If they do not understand what we try to convey, we may be sure that we have not yet fully understood a problem. I am convinced that, at least in our field, virtually any theoretical issue can be explained to students. One of the main reasons why I have increasingly emphasized the transparency of our writing style, is to make sure that our papers and books are accessible to the main audience for our work: students and scholars from other fields. As founding editor of the international journals *Poetics*, *Text*, *Discourse & Society* and *Discourse Studies*, I have insisted that authors avoid the esoteric writing that is so popular in some circles. Within the framework of critical discourse studies, such a norm is particularly relevant when we realize that scholarship should not be limited to the happy few, the initiated or to the blind followers of a guru. When writing a paper for a journal, one should first of all ask a few motivated students to give their opinion about our work.

And not only our work should be accessible to students, but also *we* should be accessible to them. One of the many complaints of students about their university study is that many of their teachers are barely accessible – these do not respond to students' e-mails, they have no time to see them, and more generally are 'distant' professors. Obviously, such behavior does not

exactly motivate students to engage in our field of specialization or in university study in general.

On Schools and Masters

What is true for our relations with the students, is also true for our relations with our (other) readers. The accessibility of our work is crucial for any kind of scholarship, and especially critical studies. Instead of having readers who admire and imitate us, we should have readers who can understand and criticize us, and who go beyond our own work to formulate new, original ideas. Few things in my academic career have irritated me more than the sect-like nature of some theoretical ‘schools’, led by a Master whose followers are more like slaves than independent scholars who also seek inspiration elsewhere. This is especially the case for those Masters whose work is so arcane that the only way to understand him is to imitate him – *him*, because mostly these Masters are men. There are examples of serious theoretical errors that have not been corrected for decades only because the followers of a Master uncritically repeated such errors without independent investigation.

When some students in their enthusiasm to have found what they were looking for too exclusively focused on my work, I have always suggested to only cite my work where relevant, as of any scholar, but especially to look for other work. No serious issue in critical discourse studies, and especially complex social problems such as racism, or theoretical topic such as discourse and their relations to knowledge or ideology are being fully treated by one person.

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