Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis

Chapter 13. Genre as Social Action

Charles Bazerman

Discourse arises among people in interaction and is part of the means by which people accomplish social actions. Meanings arise within the pragmatic unfolding of events and mediate the alignment of participants to perceptions of immediate situations and relevant contexts (whether fictive or non-fictive) called to mind by language. Language is crafted, deployed, and interpreted by individuals in the course of social participation, even when individuals use language in a personally reflective mode, considering one's own identity, commitments, and actions using received language. Language users (with particular neurophysiological capacities and individual histories of language experience) in the course of interaction call upon the resources of language that are socially and culturally available and that have been typified through histories of social circulation; nonetheless, individuals construct meanings and consequentiality from their perception of particular novel situations and their participant action in those situations. Thus situated meaning is a negotiation between the public distribution and practices of language expected within the site of communication and the personal meaning systems of the receiving individuals, developed through a lifetime of socially-embedded language use, as applied to the communicative issue at hand. These interactions over meaning may occur in here and now material space, but they also may occur at a distance of time and space, mediated through recorded language. We may use language both to cooperate in building a stone wall physically in front of us as well as to establish principles of chemical bonding in scientific publications (which, however, index and are accountable to the material chemical interactions in specialized experimental probes and in everyday life.) We may even use language to transport the imaginations of our audience into imagined events in a fictive galaxy where fundamental principles of the world we know are suspended.

The study of discourse, therefore, rightly begins with considering people in interaction to locate the worlds of meaning they create in the pursuit of human ends. In investigating meaning making of cleverly creative people in variable circumstances (though not without constraints), we need to identify the processes by which language users create order and sense so as to align with each other for mutual understanding and coordination. These coordinations build on simple grounds but lead to the complexity of the discursive world as we know it.

The thinness of the written sign

In written language (the area of my primary concern), these themes of situated alignment over meaning are both highlighted and obscured. Because written texts often communicate with people at a distance of time and space, the here and now existence of one's interlocutor is typically invisible in the moment of writing or reading. If our interlocutors come to mind, they appear as acts of imagination, based on limited clues obtained from prior texts or interactions, rather than embodied presences. Without

immediate interactive response, we cannot rapidly repair, modify, or expand the utterance to increase alignment. (Of course the affordances of new communicative technologies change synchronicities and informational channels, but fundamental issues of communication at a distance remains.) The communicative clues for a successful alignment over meanings and actions must be carried through the arrangement of the few letters of the alphabet in words, sentences, and larger units--along with punctuation, graphic elements, and materialities of the medium.

The thinness of the written signs and the distance from the receiver often leave the writer uncertain whether the produced artifact will evoke the desired meanings and effects. On the receptive side, the reader may struggle with interpretation of what precise meanings could have been intended by the author or other presenter of the signs. The problem of alignment over limited clues is most poignant when the text is written in a hard-to-read script or in a language the reader has limited familiarity with. Then the reader may be left with just inkmarks on paper that cannot be animated into meanings and intentions. Even if the reader is highly literate in the language, ambiguous words, unfamiliar references, novel ideas, difficult syntax, or complex arguments can make an act of reading an imaginative and interpretive challenge. Even when only fully common words, genres and constructions are used, the different associations, cognitive patterns, and interests of different readers can make reanimating another's meanings a challenge with only approximate results—otherwise there would be no fields of hermeneutics, literary criticism, legal disputation, and scriptural interpretation.. Nor would reader response need theorizing.

Yet these thin symbols--only interpretable in an approximate way in a different time and place by a different person with different motives and mental contents--have proved remarkably robust to allow communication of the complex thoughts of philosophy, accumulation of extensive interrelated knowledge and theories of science, planning and coordination of large architectural projects, and maintenance of large institutions such as legal systems and government bureaucracies. By what processes can these frail symbols bear so much weight of meaning and coordination?

The answer proposed in this chapter and the kinds of work reported here is that the problem of recognizability of meaning is in large part a matter of recognizing situations and actions within which the meanings are mobilized through the medium of the signs. Meaning is not fully available and immanent in the bare spelled words. Interactants' familiarity with domains of communication and relevant genres make the kind of communication recognizable: establishing roles, values, domains of content, and general actions which then create the space for more specific, detailed refined utterances and meanings spelled out in the crafted words.

This perspective has helped me understand the nature of writing, particularly within organized systems of knowledge production and transmission—as found in the academy. As a teacher of college writing, I was faced with the practical task of improving students' literacy skills to increase their engagement and participation in the literate systems of the university. As I investigated how the highly specialized practices of scientific writing

arose within the complex of evolving scientific activity (Bazerman, 1988), I began to see how the same principles of situated meaning making within activities applied to the classroom as well as to nonacademic literate practice. I also came to appreciate the role of literacy in organizing the modern world (Goody, 1986; Bazerman, 2006). As I developed this perspective, I found many of the ordinary assumptions we have about written language turned inside out.

An interest in social processes, trajectories, patterns, and systems, has led some of us to put aside for a while the more traditional attention to language and meaning. Much of the work I will summarize considers what discourse analysts might consider context with a lesser focus on discourse proper. Nonetheless the traditional issues of signifying language remain and need to be rearticulated within the new activity based framework (Bazerman, 2003; Bazerman & Prior, 2005). Attentiveness to the words, choosing the right words, and being loyal to the words written by others supports the hard work of writing intelligibly and intelligently to readers and of sympathetically reconstructing the meanings other writers attempt to evoke. Attention to the details of each other's expressions is part of an ethics of interpersonal, social engagement. However, practical attention to language always occurs within situations that orient the participants and evoke particular expectations and knowledge worlds, even if only tacitly and habitually. Aiding student development to read and write in situations with which they are less familiar (such as those in research disciplines or professions) requires we become explicit about the communicative situations, social organization, and activities they are engaging. Making explicit the organization and dynamics of communicative situations helps students know more concretely what their options are and how they might frame their goals, enhancing the potential for communicative success. The articulation of goals and repeated success in achieving them feeds back into increased motivation and engagement. Equally, in non-school settings, explicit analysis of communicative situations and options provides means to increase levels of practice, engagement and success of individual participants, and more effective organization of the social systems through redesigning genres and flows of documents. Finally an understanding of the relationship between school settings and other life settings can help align literacy education with the communicative opportunities and challenges students will face in their lives.

Activity, Agency and Utterance at the start.

Language exists in the utterances that bring it into being, and the evolving history of utterances that provide us the resources for making new utterances and that provide our interlocutors the experiences for making sense of our utterances. Volosinov's (1973) critique of language points out that Saussure's (1986) simplifications of separating langue from parole and diachrony from synchrony—and then limiting linguistics to a synchronic langue (itself a fiction out of time and place) abstracts the study of language from the concrete life of language. This critique has rearticulated by Kristeva (1980), Harris (1981, 1987), Bazerman (1988), Todorov (1990), and Hanks (1996).

While linguistics has done well in creating abstracted accounts of language based on the regularized practices of groups of language users, we must take seriously that these are

only transient formations, constantly evolving, various in their local instantiations and used creatively and purposefully by each user in a specific set of circumstance. Accordingly words are effective within the situation but do not have a timeless meaning in themselves. They serve as clues within a situation to align participants and achieve local actions. This view is consistent with theories of reading that suggest we make hypotheses about the meaning of texts based on our previous knowledge and experience, the encounter with the text prior to the current moment, and our continuing monitoring in further reading for contradictory evidence which might reassert meaning as an unsolved puzzle (Goodman, 1967; Rumelhart, 1977; Dole et al, 1991).

Meaning Making, Typification and Genre

The complexity of meaning making is visible when we see how fragmentary and indefinite utterances of young children are interpreted proleptically by the care givers around (Cole, 1996; van Lier, 2004), how people negotiate meanings and activities in high noise environments, or in the constant need for repair in spoken language as investigated by conversational analysts (Sacks, 1995; Schegloff, Sacks and Jefferson, 1977). The attempt at utterances are taken as completed when the parties decide that their needs/actions are met well enough or when they give up the endeavor or accept lower degrees of approximation, good enough for all practical purposes, as phrased in phenomenology (Schutz, 1967; Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967). All language is an approximate indicator of meaning, with some situations having narrower tolerances for accuracy and alignment than others. Rather than taking transparency of language as the norm, we rather should take those situations that achieve high degrees of alignment, shared meaning, and reliability of co-reference as specific accomplishments, to be examined for the special means of achievement in their situation. While temporary woodland shelters may be impromptu constructions from materials at hand, skyscrapers are engineering marvels attentive not only to their sites, ambient weather, and materials available on the world market, but as well to finances, client needs, and ideological climate of meanings that allow them to be constructed and used as well as the ongoing social and economic systems that allow them to be maintained. Likewise, powerful texts like durable national constitutions and canonical works of philosophy require multiple dimensions of attention, work, and design in construction and ongoing social systems of meaning animation to stay alive and meaningful. (See Bazerman, 1999b; Bazerman, 2003; and Bazerman & Prior, 2005).

Available and familiar patterns of utterances (that is, genres) provide interpretable clues that allow people to make sense of each other's utterances and to frame utterances meaningful to one's interlocutors (Bazerman, 2003). Mead (1934) has in fact proposed that our sense of the self arises from our attempts to represent our meanings to be intelligible to others within a social field. The recent discovery of mirror neurons may provide neurological basis for the abilities to take the part of the other and to reconstruct what another's meaning might have been (Rizzolatti & Criaghero, 2004). From a Vygotskian perspective we may say that the internalized words provide the means of regulating our cognitive and affective states as we orient towards social interaction (Vygotsky, 1987). Whatever the developmental, cognitive and neurological processes in

aligning to social symbols, genre identifies the recognizable kind of utterance we believe we are producing or receiving.

Within the actual contexts of use, utterances are the minimal unit, aimed at influencing others as part of our cooperative and competitive social interactions, minimally understandable as an act, an intention, a meaning to be transmitted. Its recognizability makes it perceivable as an intended act, an intended influence, an intended transformation of the interlocutor's attention and orientation. In a fundamental way, an utterance acts as the utterer's attempt to define the situation as a site of action for his or her utterance, what in rhetoric would be called the rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 1968) or *kairos* (Miller, 1992) and what Goffman might consider as footing or framing (Goffman, 1974, 1981). Miller (1984), following Schutz's concept of typification (1967) has associated genre with a typified response to a typified situation. That is the utterer sees the moment as similar to other moments in which certain kinds of utterances have been effective. Insofar as these typifications and their attendant instantiating moments are circulated and familiar within the group of interlocutors, they facilitate mutual comprehension and intelligibity of an utterance within a shared recognized context (Bazerman, 1994b).

Typification, Social Organization, and Social Change

Genre typifications result from a process of psycho-social category formation. The categories themselves have no permanent substance. Genre taxonomies, nonetheless, can be useful to map users' categories within a defined social historical space (such as Devitt's 1991 study of tax accountancy letters) and to define wide-spread functional patterns in robust social systems. Further, though human neurobiological organization may favor certain patterns of cognition (such as episodic memory) and perception, (such as organization and salience in visual fields) that may in turn lead to preferences for certain sequencing of statements or recognition of text structures, these still operate below the level of organized social utterance within coordinated activity. Even in the short run, major changes in social relations, economic conditions, governmental regulations, disciplinary goals communicative technologies or other situational dimensions can lead to lead to a rapid genre change. Indeed the affordances of electronic search, rapid communication, and instantaneous access to wide ranges of information are currently changing genres in numerous social spheres vary rapidly, with further consequences for the social organization of activities, leading to further genre evolution.

What provides for communicative stability is not the genre in itself, but the activity system it is part of (Bazerman, 1994a; Engestrom, 1987, 1990; Russell, 1997a). Activity systems often give rise to larger institutions in which the circulation of texts and literate activities are infrastructural (Giddens, 1984). For example Swales' (1990) "create a research space" model of scientific article introductions relies on a robust system of scientific communication supported by explicit intertextuality, tied to disciplinary specialization emerging in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, framed by a communal ethos of cooperative investigation, channeled through competitive individual contributions (Bazerman, 1991).

No matter how stabilized and defining genres may appear within some long enduring social systems, we must also remember that genre is a categorization of an utterance and is not a full account or description of any individual utterance itself and its meaning. Even if a text is widely and unproblematically attributable to a single genre (let us say a bank check) it nonetheless carries out a specific communication in a specific context, identifying payer, payee, bank and account, and dates of transaction and will fail if there is some failure in these elements reported in the document. Further these documents can circulate to different situations as parts of different activities, even if the original context is recognized. In a court proceeding, this check (recognized as such) may turn into a piece of evidence of fraud (if it meets another very special set of criteria drawn from legal rules of evidence). Fifty years from now it can become historical evidence of financial dealings of a famous writer. That is, it may be viewed both variously and multiply in terms of genre. Genres facilitate interpretation of meaning or anticipation of interpretation, and may thereby guide production or reception, but they do not rule absolutely nor do they displace local acts of meaning making which have evolutionary potential for the systems they are embedded in.

Speech Acts, Social Facts, Knowledge, and knowledge transitivity

An utterance noted and attended to is a speech act. What kind of speech act it is perceived as and what are the felicity conditions it must meet for success, are very much a matter of typification, in terms of how the interlocutor sees the situation and the utterance as an intervention in the situation. We judge what is happening now on the basis of what has come before—what has been understood, what has been the consequence, how events have typically unfolded, what has seemed an adequate understanding of the utterance acceptable by relevant parties. (In tying speech acts to historically evolving social arrangements I follow the more open ended definition of felicity conditions proposed by Austin (1962) rather than the universalizing pragmatic grammar proposed by Searle (1969).)

The successful speech act creates a social fact, both in the recognition of its accomplishment (e.g. we all agree you have made a bet, committed to a valid contract, etc.) and in terms of the contents represented and relied on (e.g., a sports event is going to occur at a certain time and venue with certain participants, upon which the bet is placed). Social facts are those things that people believe and are true in their consequences, whatever their accountable relation to material events may be. In fact strong social facts that run up against an accountable contradiction with material events create their own set of consequences—perhaps a riot at the sports venue when the gates are locked and the teams do not show, despite the contract on the printed ticket.

Since utterances are the site for the creation and transmission of speech acts and social facts, the typification of utterances in genres is related to the recognizability of acts and the location of facts. Inversely, we can understand the effectiveness of texts in large part through their success in accomplishing speech acts and establishing social facts. Thus a successful bet or a successful court sentence or a successful scientific paper relies both on being enacted by the right participants in the appropriate situation, and on adopting a

suitable form and meeting a series of expectations about the fact and reasoning presented within. In these different genred utterances and associated acts, there are particulars presented and reasoned about that also are accountable to other non-textual dimensions of the ambient worlds. These accountable relations are also structured through typified, genred understanding. Thus a court decision must appropriately index relevant laws, judicial rules, and precedents in such a way as to persuasively identify them as authoritative in this case; the decision as well hangs on appropriate indexing and consideration of the evidence. Somewhat differently, the scientific paper must articulate with prior theory and findings as aggregated in the relevant literatures (relevancy here also being a negotiated construction), as well as current evidence gathered in ways that meet evaluative criteria and expectations of the most influential peer readers. All these conditions must continue to stand for the text to be meaningful and consequential for the ongoing work of the court or scientific discipline.

Thus different genres are the origin, part of the validation system, and means of circulation, storage, and access of particular pieces of knowledge. Further, these or related genres are the means of reasoning about and responding to the facts established, as well as applying the knowledge to specific circumstances (Bazerman, 2000). Material, social, and textual universes surrounding each document are indexed and made relevant in the document by explicit representation or implicit assumption, establishing knowledge to be mobilized in reading the document. Thus we can say that knowledge is created and resides within specific genre and activity systems. Bakhtin's concept of chronotope (1981) provides a useful way of characterizing the expected knowledge and reasoning to be found in a genre. Bakhtin associates each genre with a particular space-time world that is represented in each text; moreover within that space-time there are anticipated characters, landscapes, relations, and events. Fairy tales happen long ago in a kingdom far away, where kings, queens, princes and princesses reside in castles while dragons and evil sorcerers threaten the countryside. The princes slay the dragons and overcome sorcerers to win the hearts of princesses. Similarly, papers in experimental psychology represent certain kinds of evidence produced through recognized methods, and then reasoned about in accepted ways, using a limited lexicon of expected concepts and terms. It would be shocking to the readers of such articles if dragons or psychoanalytic observations were to appear.

If some of the expectations were to be violated it would be noticeable, hybridizing the genre and changing the ideological world—as in a feminist fairy-tale where the princess slays the dragon and creates an alliance with the evil sorceress who turns out to have been the victim of sexist stigmatization. When accomplished speech acts in one domain travel to another they both carry some of the assumptions and practices of the original domain as well as become transformed by the practices of the new domain. It is up to the readers to be convinced that this hybridization and change of the chronotope is legitimate. Thus bringing chemical evidence and physical reasoning into genetics in the middle of the last century required a great deal of preparation and argument for these to be accepted within the chronotopes of articles published in genetics journals (Ceccarelli, 2001).

This linkage between genres, speech acts, and social facts is visible when we, for example, seek to identify someone's citizenship. We know there are certain documentary locations where such information is established and kept, such as governmental records offices where birth certificates are filed or passport records are kept. Further the documents in question not only store the information but in fact establish the legitimacy and facticity of the information, entering it into a network of related documents that refer and respond to each other. The intertextual link with the originary record maintains the legitimacy of all the secondary documents. Genres are typified not only in the facts they use, but in the other genres they typically draw on, refer to, or otherwise use. Even the form of representation of the other text is generically typified. A news story can summarize and repeat prior reporting on the event without specific citation or quotation, while nonetheless intentionally evoking the readers' memory of previous reports. That same news story may need to be meticulous about identifying the exact words and venue of a politician's unsurprising public statement at the same time as attributing a significant paraphrased revelation to "unidentified sources." This relationship among texts, or intertextuality, places every written utterance in a network of related utterances, whether explicitly mentioned, unmentioned but potentially mobilizable, or entirely implicit in the institutional and intellectual environment which forms the conditions for the current document.

Within activity systems, the intertext takes on an orderliness from the typical patterns of circulation, use and sequence of texts. Within an activity system, texts circulate among a particular grouping of people who have specific action interests in the documents and who are bound together by some or all of the documents in the genre system. Thus a medical office has appointment records, patient appointment notices, patient intake forms, medical records, transmittal slips for tests and test results, billing records, bills, payments, insurance forms, authorizations for procedures that might involve patients, insurers, or hospital review boards. These documents follow each other in particular sequences as patients move through the system. There are specific sequences of documents that Swales (2004) has called genre chains. Within this each complex circulation of relation genres, or genre system, each person has a specific set of documents they are responsible for preparing and which they have access to. This Devitt (1991) has called the genre set. These sets of documentary relations between participants (who gets to read what, written by whom) sets up a series of genre roles and relationships that define a person's participation in the genre system Further as systems interact, sometimes genres move from one system to another or systems take on the character of others, in what Bhatia has a called genre colonization (2004).

The systematic circulation of genres among particular groupings serves to mediate communications within an activity system, that is a group of people in systematic relations in pursuit of work or transformations of the environment (Bazerman, 1994a). The texts within these groups mediate communications (along with communications in other channels). The typification of message occasions and structures social and organizational relations in pursuit of the system's ends, providing a regularized communicative infrastructure. Within the genres of activity systems, the typified epistemic and ontological choices as well as typical concepts, roles, stances, evaluations,

lexicon, intertextuality, and other linguistic features serve in effect something like Foucault's (1970) episteme or discourse, inscribing an ideology and defining power relations. A genre/utterance/activity approach to this ideological/power process, however, provides a more articulated and realistic model of the specific circulation of linguistic tokens and associated meanings attached to specific actions within larger activity systems. Further this model identifies specific actors with different roles and access to act within the communicative relations and the activity system. This model identifies more concretely where power lies, how it is exercised, and what it can accomplish as well as how that power is associated with particular meanings and linguistic expressions, towards which different participants may have different access, stances, and uses.

Insofar as knowledge moves beyond its original genre and social ambit, there must be particular points of articulation as it moves from one genre and activity system to the next. Thus science gets into broader public spheres because journalists read certain scientific journals looking for findings they can turn into news stories, or because university public relations offices identify accomplishments with publicity value, or because a business enterprise has a commercial stake in exciting the public about some findings. Edison, for example, understood better than his competitors that the project of developing a system of electric and power required the enlistment of many groups of people. Edison needed to create presence, meaning, and value for electric light and power within their respective discursive systems. His prior experience as a childhood newsboy, as a freelance electrical inventor, as a patent holder, as a contractor to telephone and telegraph industrialists, and as a news celebrity following the invention of the phonograph prepared him to translate the meanings of his proposed project to seek support. Understanding how telegraphy, railroad distribution, and urbanization were creating a new kind of public forum, he saw the importance celebrity interviews and feature stories were taking to sell newspapers; he soon learned to become a good interview subject in order to publicize his new ventures. Understanding the rise of new financial markets to support large enterprises based on new technology, he was able to present his project as a potential financial bonanza to a cadre of elite investors and then later to financial markets. Understanding the patent system and the complexity of patent litigation, he and his attorneys were able to create a web of protections that maintained his ownership of a rapidly changing technology. Understanding how to draw on the skills of his inventive collaborators and communicate effectively with them, he was able to invent a new kind of industrial laboratory coordinated through a set of shared laboratory notebooks and other documents. Although an outsider to the European-based community of electrical scientists, he understood the importance of gaining their acknowledgment of the success of his system. With the help of his colleagues he understood the importance of representing the electric light as an attractive enhancement to new forms of urban domesticity. His energetic representations of the light in each of these forums were fundamental to his success. These representations were so important to him that he was willing to adopt unconventional means to make sure that he got the representations he needed, including bribing journalists, paying off city officials, packing scientific juries, and giving inside information to investors. The one major communicative failure, in turning the charismatic personal communications of his early companies into more

regularized bureaucratic communications of a large corporation, contributed to his loss of ownership of General Edison, which became General Electric (Bazerman, 1999a).

A troubling example of the large barrier between the literatures of two domains is that of the circuitous paths by which the scientific literature does or does not get into the courts. The courts, intertextually linked to the legal code, prior judgments, legal opinions, and specific evidentiary documents, does not directly recognize the authority of scientific findings. Rather, in the United States, scientists are qualified through a process known as Daubert hearings to be expert witnesses, who can then express opinions about relevant issues in the case based on their expertise. The scientific literature does not speak directly in the court, but only stands behind the expertise of the expert witness. The nature and quality of the scientific testimony in court is then a product of the procedures and contestations of the Daubert hearing (Bazerman, 2009b). Even between neighboring scientific specialties there are often barriers to communication, only overcome when need for and usefulness of each other's findings relaxes those barriers and brings greater acceptance of each other's procedures, as in the case of toxicology and ecotoxicology. Toxicology is a longstanding medical/pharmaceutically based specialty that has done controlled laboratory studies on laboratory bred animals to determine safe versus lethal doses of specific substances; ecotoxicology is less than forty years old and attempts to understand the impact of pollutants within naturally occurring ecosystems. It uses uncontrolled field studies and gathers results statistically. The founders of ecotoxicology felt toxicology's findings were not relevant for the environmental issues that concerned them, and practitioners of the traditional field looked on the new field as too uncontrolled and imprecise to produce valid findings. Only over time as they each needed each other's findings for their separate purposes did some cross citation begin to occur (Bazerman & de los Santos, 2005).

Genres, Socialization, and Cognitive Development

From a Vygotskian perspective, it is worth noting that genres present the intersection between the socially organized interpersonal creation of knowledge and reasoning and the intrapersonal thought, as the individual learns to participate and contribute in those genres, activities, and knowledge systems (Vygotsky, 1987). This intersection involves both processes of internalization, making sense of the socially circulated knowledge and forms, and externalization of one's own thought by expressing it through the language and forms appropriate to the genres one practices (Bazerman, 2009a). Following Scribner & Cole (1981), cognitive development is not so much directly in the language as in the purposes which the languages are used for within the ambient social systems. Thus the relation of genre, utterance, activity, and social cultural forms all bear on how language and literacy affect cognition.

Studying the genres and discourses people are immersed in and how they take up the ambient linguistic tools within their own expressions and actions becomes a means to study the intersection of socialization and cognitive formation. Matching students own forms of expression with of the full corpus of the readings students gained in their

professional training (such as reported by Parodi, 2009), might help us understand something of the process by which they are learning to think in the appropriate lines of their work. Similar in spirit is Berkenkotter, Huckin and Ackerman's study (1991) of the uptake of disciplinary forms of citation by a graduate student in rhetoric and composition.

This approach also offers a framework for considering cognitive development as students engage in the communicative systems of their disciplines in higher education (Sternglass, 1997; Prior, 1998; Herrington & Curtis, 2000; Caroll, 2002; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006; Rogers, 2010) as well as within occupational and professional settings (Russell, 1997b; Dias et al. 1999; Beaufort, 1999).

Implications for discourse analysis

The perspective presented here has several clear implications for the analysis of discourse.

First, discourse occurs within a social situation and should be understood and analyzed as it operates meaningfully within that situation.

Second. discursive situations are understood by their participants as organized and structured so as to be meaningful and sensible to them. The mechanisms by which definitions of situation and action are shared among participants are at the heart of social systematicity and the organization of discourse.

Third, the knowledge, thought, and meanings expressed within situated utterances then become part of the ongoing resources and definition of the situation for future utterances. Discourse is to be understood dynamically within the construction of those situations and the larger social activity systems within which those utterances occur.

Fourth, regularities of linguistic form usually accompany stabilizations of social groups and activities—so to look for linguistic orders we should look to social orders and to look for social orders we should look to linguistic orders. While in the past geography may have been the dominant covariable of linguistic variation, with literacy and other communication at a distance technology, the social covariables of linguistic variation are increasingly tied to more extensive groupings such as social and cultural institutions, disciplines and professions, work organizations, and media audiences.

Fifth, linguistic entrainment into particular discursive practices goes hand in hand with socialization into activity networks and with cognitive development into the forms of thinking associated with interacting in those activity systems. Internalization of linguistic action transforms into dispositions and orientations.

Sixth, when discourse travels outside of its original ambit, the mechanisms for that wider travel are themselves topics of examination. This includes study of the genres within which such discourses arise, the genres in which they travel, and the genres into which they are received, as well as the processes that occur at the translation border between

genres. Those discourses that seem to circulate freely among multiple situations also deserve investigation for the mechanisms by which they appear meaningful at multiple sites, and differential ways they are integrated into different discursive systems and their genres.

In sum, utterances are parts of social life, and the discourses produced within our social life are to be understood within all the dimensions of life. The signs we study are only the residue of complex psycho-social-cultural processes, in which they served as mediators of meaning. While we may study them as residues, for the regularities to be found in residues, their fundamental order is only to be found in their full animation as meaningful communication in the unfolding interactions of life. The orders of discourse are to be found in the dynamics of life processes.

Related Topics

The Ethnography of Communication; Genre and Systemic Functional Linguistics; Professional Written Genres; EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and Discourse Analysis.

For Further Reading

Bazerman, 1994a; Bazerman, 1994b; Bazerman, 2000; Bazerman, 2006; Bazerman 2009a; Bazerman & Prior, 2005; Miller, 1984; and Russell, 1997a elaborate the key theoretical issues of the perspective adopted here. Overviews of the relevant empirical studies can be found in Bazerman, 1999b; Bazerman, 2006; Bazerman 2008; and Russell, 1997b. Methodological guidelines for carrying out research and text analysis from this perspective can be found in Bazerman, 2008b and Bazerman & Prior, 2004.

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