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An overlooked book in French about discourse analysis and social demand

Frédéric Pugnière-Saavedra, Frédérique Sitri, Marie Veinard. 2012. *L'Analyse du discours dans la société. Engagement du chercheur et demande sociale*. Paris: Honoré Champion.

No matter what a scholar does in almost every domain of the social sciences, discourse analysis often constitutes a fundamental tool for research, measurement, and validation. This book about discourse analysis and social demand gathers 26 chapters by an international array of scholars (from Portugal, Greece, Romania, Canada), all written in French. The three co-editors organised their book into three separate parts about (1) the role and position of the researcher, (2) possible interdisciplinary intersections for discourse analysis, and (3) the dynamics of ideologies and the social construction of collective identities in European countries. These three parts are themselves subdivided into unnumbered sections.

After the co-editors' prologue, the opening section deals with epistemological issues and proposes conceptual discussions on concepts such as social demand and sociolinguistics. However, most essays in this first section are rather disappointing as they sometimes elaborate a complex framework that only leads to a thin conclusion; this is particularly true with the opening chapter on the use of majuscule in 19th century France and chapter 2 about globalisation as an ideology in Brazil. Perhaps the most rewarding of this portion, the following chapter draws from the Critical Discourse Analysis approach (which is relatively uncommon in France) and aptly situates this approach; this contribution by Adèle Petitclerc is clear and vivid, even in her numerous definitions and useful articulations between "discourse" and "ideology"; following Louis Althusser's framework, Adèle Petitclerc reminds the reader "the discourse is the place where ideology manifests itself" (p. 68).

Within the second section of the first part, some chapters are interesting discussions about paradigms (and how they are imposed) within the French academia in mid-20th century, like Josiane Boutet's text centered on sociolinguist Marcel Cohen (1884-1974), who was more or less left behind by his colleagues despite his vast culture and knowledge; maybe because he was just a French communist at the worst moment (at the end of Stalinism, p. 111). As Josiane Boutet demonstrates in her fascinating text (perhaps the most vivid in this collection), Marcel Cohen could have been the leading voice in French sociolinguistics, but the community preferred to elect and praise his rival Émile Benveniste, who ranked himself in a totally different background (p. 111).

In the following section, another chapter (by Rui Ramos, Paula Cristina Martins, Sara Pereira, and Madalena Oliveira) presents a detailed and rigorous discourse analysis about a

recurrent theme, endangered children, as represented in the Portuguese media, with selected keywords and a solid theoretical framework applied to Portuguese culture and highlighting how some subjective journalists often try to “dramatise” and “amplify” events (p. 197) and then, after setting the background, “let events speak for themselves” (p. 205). Here, language in the Portuguese media is reaffirmed as “framing” (“un système modélisant primaire”, p. 196). Undoubtedly the most original essay in this subgroup, we find a discourse analysis comparing various letters of application using similar formulations (such as “I would like to apply” or “I would like to present my candidacy”, p. 257); interestingly, the authors compare as well the degree of politeness in these letters, especially in the last sentence and signature (p. 261).

Some chapters are not just case studies, but rather interesting and broader discussions about discourse analysis and other related dimensions, especially in the last part which discusses a wide array of issues related politicisation, gender, and social representations in the public sphere. Among the most representative essays included here, one finds in the third part, Thierry Guilbert’s excellent chapter centred on social demand and the media. It begins with a strong distinction between interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity, that latter being “a global and integrated vision that organises knowledge from various disciplines into the comprehension of complex issues” (p. 390). Then, these three approaches are being triangulated in an interesting way in order to apprehend ideological discourses and their fundamental dynamics of legitimisation in the media, making things and ideas appear as rational and evident (p. 392). Finally, this book ends with Patricia von Münchow’s chapter which prolongs her noted book (von Münchow 2011) comparing books for parents published in France and Germany, an effort which was praised by many critics (Laberge 2013).

As so many collective efforts, this *L’Analyse du Discours dans la société* goes in (too) many directions; the result is neither a guide nor a comprehensive overview of the discipline.

Perhaps my (too) high expectations were ignited by the book’s title, which seems broad and systematic, even though the co-editors never pretended to be comprehensive. There is no thread or clear direction except for displaying various examples of discourse analysis in a diversity of countries, but the book’s title does not reflect this diversity of national cases. Of course, most scholars in sociolinguistics might feel familiar with the general contributions included here while graduate students would probably only select a few texts in narrower niches or centred on specific countries. From my experience, reading it from one cover to the last confirms this kind of collection of essays is not made to be read in its entirety. This is not to say these essays are pointless; to the contrary, most of them are coherent and rigorous, well written and aptly documented. Only a few typos remain (“displinarisation”, p. 56). Of

course, potential readers ought to have a superior understanding of French to take advantage of these sometimes dense contributions. Since this collection of essays is not likely to be translated in other languages, non-Francophone scholars might ask whether they should try to read it; in my view, I have to say there are some more accurate readings that should come first in this field if someone has only one book in French to read in sociolinguistics. Nevertheless, most of the contributions mentioned above can undoubtedly be seen as cutting edge research in their specific subfields of sociolinguistics.

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