

Dolón, R. & Todolí, J. (eds.) (2008)
Analysing Identities in Discourse

AMSTERDAM/PHILADELPHIA
JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING
ISBN 978 90 272 2719 5
204 PÁGINAS

Analysis Identities in Discourse contains a selection of papers which were originally presented at the First International Conference on CDA held in Valencia in 2004. The volume, compiled and edited by Dolón and Todolí, is made up of a short preface, an introductory chapter (Part 1) and seven other articles which have been subdivided into three parts: "The discursive construction of identity in educational contexts"; "National and cultural identity"; "Identity construction and human suffering". Although these headings add form and structure to the work, the articles are, in fact, free-standing, independent studies which can be read in any order. Sharing a critical discourse approach, the articles explore various contexts in which identity is constructed in situations of dominance or abuse of power.

The book begins with a scholarly introductory article entitled "The integrative view of identities in discourse" in which Grad and Martín Rojo offer an excellent overview of the different ways in which the concept of identity can be approached and defined, and how CDA, in turn, contributes to a fuller understanding of the concept and its processes. The main body of the paper presents a clear and full account of various topics (e.g. "multiplicity" and "hybridity"; "assimilation" and "differentiation") which have shaped the modern theories and concept of identity in its social context

Grad and Martín Rojo conclude by outlining the book's critical approach. They argue that a critical discourse approach makes an important contribution through what Foucault (1984) referred to as the *problematization* of identity.

What underlies the critical perspective is the aim to problematize concepts and representations, to call into question evidence and postulates, to break habits and ways of acting and thinking, to dissipate the familiar and accepted, to retrieve the measure of rules and institutions, to show the techniques of production of knowledge, the techniques of domination and also the techniques of control of discourse (p. 23).

Part 2 consists of three articles which examine, in different ways, how identity is constructed in schools in three distinct countries. In the first of these articles, "Imposing and resisting ethnic categorization in multicultural classrooms", Martín Rojo discusses the construction identity of students in multicultural school environments in Spain. The study is based on recent linguistic research carried out in schools in and around Madrid where, in some cases, more than 90% of students come from immigrant backgrounds. Not only do the

analysis and findings provide food for thought and pose significant challenges for teachers and the education authorities, they also raise important issues which need to be addressed by modern Spanish society as a whole.

Reinforcing the ideas shared in the introductory chapter, the author begins by reflecting on what constitutes a critical perspective and what distinguishes it from other discursive approaches, arguing that a critical position demands a “problematizing process” in which assumed concepts and representations are questioned, old habits broken and new commitment established. From this perspective Martín Rojo analyses the ways in which the identities of both local and immigrant students are constructed, and argues that despite external attempts to cater and allow for multicultural diversity, pedagogic discourse often, consciously or unconsciously, creates a dichotomy between the “inclusive us” and the “exclusive them”. Citing transcribed interactions recorded in the classroom, as well as interviews with teachers and students, the author explores how the identity construction in discourse is closely related to processes of domination and argues that strategies of polarization (categorization and contrast) ultimately affect school performance and levels of integration.

The findings suggest that current teaching strategies, materials and school policies privilege homogeneity at the expense of potentially enriching cultural and linguistic diversity. Compensatory and bridging classes for immigrants, which ultimately aim to integrate them, in fact serve to mark, separate and isolate and reinforce the process of “decapitalization”. This inevitably influences student-student as well as student-teacher power relations. Although Martín Rojo provides examples of resistance discourses on the part of marginalised minorities, she concludes that their effect may have paradoxical consequences: empowering on one hand yet weakening the ethnic group on the other by “reinforcing their exclusion from the academic system” as well as generating “inter-group conflicts” (p. 55).

In the second of the articles in this section, Liu examines how a patriotic discourse is constructed and transmitted to Chinese children from a young age through the reading material used in primary schools. The study is based on the examination of 99 of the 308 texts which appear in a set of Chinese basal readers used in Chinese primary schools nationwide (although it is unclear how many children actually use these books). By analysing the generic devices and the choices of lexicon and grammatical structure, Liu identifies five principal interlinked perspectives from which a patriotic discourse is constructed. These are: “the desired love of for the country”, “the great culture and people”, “the natural beauties of the country”, “the happy life of the people” and “work and sacrifice for the country”. He goes on to convincingly show how, through an intertextual chain of texts, a “rosy picture” is painted of a beautiful land where people live happily. A sense of loyalty and national pride is instilled and children are indoctrinated to love their country, and to love the country is, by implication, to love the government. Textbooks, in this way are used as propaganda tools legitimating the government’s vision.

The author argues that Chinese national identity discourses construct an unreal and imagined idyll which fail to recognise social or racial tension and “deliberately disengage and estrange students from a reading of the real world, thus leaving them disempowered in

their learning process" (p. 72). With Chinese society undergoing rapid social and ideological change, a new open discourse is advocated with images and texts that reflect a truer picture of modern-day China. Critical readings and pedagogy, the author argues, will allow students to empower themselves and actively participate in the process of renegotiating their collective identities.

The final article in this section, "The denial of Palestinian national and territorial identity in Israeli schoolbooks of history and geography 1996-2003" does not pull any punches. Firmly rejecting Firer's (2004: 75) claims that politically incorrect stereotypes of Arabs and Palestinians as well as discriminatory language have all but disappeared from modern textbooks, Peled-Elhanan argues that Palestinians are still victims of racist representations. Using a social semiotic approach and adopting Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) multimodal analysis techniques, which start from their premise that every sign is motivated, the author examines the ways in which textual and visual discourses presented in Israeli schoolbooks "erase, deny or distort the identity of Palestinians" (p. 78).

The author points to various ways in which this marginalisation and negation is achieved, from visual exclusion of books and maps to the continued representation of Palestinians in terms of racist stereotypes and the use of genericization to create a racist dichotomy between the "inclusive us" and "exclusive them". Particularly interesting is her examination of the use of colour in textbooks as a tool of manipulative representation. However, the subtle differences between "red-brown green" symbolising "progress" and "modernity" as opposed to the "yellow-olive green and brown-red" of "backwardness" and "non-Jewish tradition" is clearly difficult for the reader to perceive or discern in black and white plates.

While the author's conviction and ideological commitment are clear and her general arguments may be convincing, her discourse often lacks balance and a semblance of academic objectivity. Blunt statements that "Israeli schoolbooks educate students to hostility and contempt towards their immediate neighbours" and "inculcate Jewish superiority and heterophobia" (p. 104) need to be more precisely and directly substantiated through her analysis. Her criteria for the choice of textbooks (one of which by the author's admission is unauthorized by the Ministry of Education) is also somewhat vague. The author's footnote stating that "I chose the textbooks that were mostly bought according to bookstore reports" (p. 78) arguably needs further clarification.

Peled-Elhanan's provocative paper undoubtedly contributes to the wider discussion on what Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 24) termed "elite racism". Like Liu in the previous article, the author stresses the power of textbooks as a means of state propaganda, and argues that where a critical reading of the official narrative may be considered "unpatriotic" or even "an act of treason" teachers and students need "explicit instruction of the ways in which these texts convey their messages" (p. 83).

Closely related to the last section, Part 3 deals with "National and Cultural Identity". In the first of the two papers in this section, Hector Grad examines the extent to which European and national identities are compatible. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach which combines a social psychological analytical framework with a critical discourse analysis, "The discursive building of European identity" forms part of an ambitious study

which, in its broadest terms, explores how supra-national and ethnoregional nationalisms cohabit with a European identity. It seeks to examine the possible (in)compatibilities/conflicts of European and national categories built in discourse and the stances adopted by social actors to legitimize their relationships.

From an initial survey of 400, 54 young adults who initially revealed either a weak identification with Europe or alternatively a strong one were selected for further in-depth interview. The choice of sample makes the study particularly interesting and diverse. By analysing 18-24 year olds from two parts of Spain (Madrid and Bilbao) with potentially different national leanings and from cities in two UK countries (Manchester and Edinburgh), Grad is in effect comparing two different identities in four very different cultural and national contexts.

Basing the analysis on four discerned discourse aspects ("subject attitude moves", "strategies of social categorization", "strategies of articulation of social categories" and "argumentative schemes"), Grad identifies two fundamental mechanisms of articulating identification with Europe: *automatic* and *non-automatic*. *Automatic* articulation is seen as a Cartesian-like objective discursive response which perceives Europe as a geographical rather than a social category. (e.g. "I consider myself Spanish, and as Spain is part of Europe, well I consider myself European" (p. 119). *Non-automatic* articulation, by contrast, requires a more elaborative internal discourse and supposes a "subjective self-categorization logic" which implies that the individual *feels* European.

Findings showed that *automatic* mechanism was present in less than 1 in 5 of those interviewed and figures for *non-automatic* articulation were considerably lower. Although the distribution amongst the 4 national variables (Madrid, Bilbao, Manchester, Edinburgh) are discussed and percentage figures are provided, given the relatively small sample combined with the low overall figures, a comparative analysis is, from a statistical point of view, unreliable. However important foundation stones are laid on which future research can be built. The real significance of Grad's study lies in the clear suggestion that European category can be construed in different ways and is not incompatible with other national identities. This would seem to refute some of the classical structural views established by Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self Category Theory (SCT). A fuller understanding of the complexities of this question clearly has significant implications for the social and educational policy development of EU member states.

In "9-11 Response(s)", Hussein analyses the discursive responses of Arabs living in the United States of America to the events of September 11 2001. The study focuses on the reactions of three on-line Arab-American groups: ADC, Ahbab and AWSA. While all three share a commitment to the promotion of human rights, they differ in that ADC (the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee) is described as a "mainstream political organization", whereas the other two are forums for marginalised groups: gay and lesbian Arabs in the case of Ahbab and Arab women's solidarity in the case of AWSA.

Adopting a Systematic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach and applying Fairclough's (1995) framework, Hussein carries out an extensive comparative analysis of the themes, modality, transitivity, wording, and word meaning of the press releases issued by each of the

groups on their websites in response to the September 11 attacks. Although perhaps restricted in content and scope given the limited data used, Hussein's study makes interesting reading and makes the point that there was not one uniform Arab-American reaction but a multiplicity of responses. The article rejects the misguided tendency to generalize and treat Arab Americans as "one monolithic group" rather than a heterogeneous community with different political and organizational stances which, as the author shows, gave rise to different discursive responses to 9-11, depending on the respective agendas.

The last two articles have been placed under the heading "Identity construction and human suffering", yet their foci are quite different. Offering a revealing insight into the way in which dominant discourses within the courtroom silence, distort and mould the identities of litigants, "Sexual assault trials, discursive identities and institutional change" first analyses the limitations of the language and interpretative repertoires used in rape and sexual assault trials. Citing legal and linguistic research literature, Ehrlich shows that although Canadian law considers sexual assault to be a crime of violence, the language used by judges in "non-stranger rape" cases often serves to decriminalise and legitimise the act. Far from being seen to be victims of acts of violence, women in such cases are often conceptualised as participants in consensual sex.

Discourse limitations are not only reflected in the language of judges and lawyers but also in the ways the complainants themselves describe their own ordeals. This is illustrated and analysed by the author using data cited from a civil case brought by a victim of incest. Through statements such as "my father was having sex with me" and "I had had sex with my dad" the author rightly argues that the complainant represents herself as an active participant rather than the prey of acts of coercive violence. This common tendency for women in such cases not to recognise or represent themselves as true victims of abuse, force and violence is clearly not helped by the lack of an adequate well-developed discourse framework to represent sexual abuse by non-strangers.

In the final part of her paper Ehrlich describes a counter-hegemonic feminist discourse which, in the legal context, depicts non-stranger rape as an act of violence. Citing a civil case brought against a doctor for damages for sexual assault and breach of trust during pelvic examinations, Ehrlich analyses the way the complainant's lawyer skilfully leads her client, through presuppositions embedded, both lexically and grammatically, in the questions she asks her (e.g. "Did anyone else force you to engage in non-consensual sex during your teenage years?"). As representations of identities and experiences are subject to the discourses which are available in a given society or culture, Ehrlich concludes that "the attempt to naturalize a feminist, counter-hegemonic discourse may have significant implications for the legal system's treatment of non-stranger sexual abuse and assault" (p. 175).

Although attitudes towards AIDS and those who suffer from it have undoubtedly changed since the disease was first recognised in 1981, stigma and discrimination, which often arise from fear and ignorance, remain. In "The representation of PLWHAS and the dangerous other", Lean & Lee examine how people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) have been portrayed in *Time* magazine over a period of more than 20 years, starting in 1983 when AIDS began to receive

media coverage. Adhering closely to Fairclough's (2003) CDA paradigm, seven variables are established which aim to show how the social actors are discursively depicted.

The analysis of the five extracts scrutinised in this paper is divided into two parts. The first identifies how, through discourse representations, a subtle yet clear distinction is established between those "innocent victims" of the disease (e.g. children born with AIDS; haemophiliacs) and those "guilty perpetrators" (e.g. homosexuals; drug users) who are portrayed as victims of their own actions. The second half of the study looks at the identity construction of PLWHAS as well as PAWDS, i.e. those "high-risk groups" of people associated with the disease (e.g. homosexuals, intravenous drug users and prostitutes). Lean and Lee's analysis shows that, in both cases, through the language of discourse, polarisation exists between "us" and "them", with the clear implications being that "we are good" and "they are bad".

In conclusion, *Analysing Identities in Discourse* makes a significant contribution to the study of identity and critical discourse analysis. As outlined from the outset, the underlying aim of this type of analysis is to question and challenge previous views and ways of thinking, and by so doing to bring about social change. The studies in this volume, to varying degrees and from diverse positions, fulfil the important first stage. While in some cases the methods and criteria used for text selection and data collection are not as clear as they might be, all the articles are thought-provoking and the general standard of analysis and discussion is high. Although the preface and introductory chapter skilfully try to provide a degree of unity and tie the articles together, it is difficult to treat and review the volume as a homogeneous entity. While sharing common ground and outlook, the studies vary in style, content and approach. But the strength of the work arguably lies precisely in this diversity and the multiplicity of subject matter it offers, making it stimulating reading for experts in the field as well as those less familiar with CDA.

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Fecha de admisión:

5.2.2010

Fecha de publicación:

15.6.2010