

The Cambridge Handbook of Discourse Studies

Discourse studies, which encompasses the ways in which language is used in texts and contexts, is a fast-moving and increasingly diverse field. With contributions from leading and upcoming scholars from across the world, and covering cutting-edge research, this handbook offers an up-to-date survey of discourse studies. It is organized according to perspectives and areas of engagement, with each chapter providing an overview of the historical development of its topic, the main current issues, debates and synergies, and future directions. The handbook presents new perspectives on well-established themes such as narrative, conversation-analytic and cognitive approaches to discourse, while also embracing a range of up-to-the-minute topics from post-humanism to digital surveillance, recent methodological orientations such as linguistic landscapes and multimodal discourse analysis, and new fields of engagement such as discourses on race, religion and money.

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The Cambridge Handbook of Discourse Studies

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978-1-108-42514-8 — The Cambridge Handbook of Discourse Studies

Edited by Anna De Fina , Alexandra Georgakopoulou

Frontmatter

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Preface

Discourse analysis is nowadays a broad and cross-disciplinary field of studies and scholars seem to be unanimous in describing it as too difficult to delimit. Indeed, discourse analytic studies have surged not only within fields that have in common an interest in language use, such as linguistic anthropology, pragmatics, ethnography and media and communication studies, but also in a wide range of disciplines such as anthropology, history, psychology, literary studies, philosophy and sociology, to mention but a few. In turn, there is a diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives. It is symptomatic of this diversity and the complexity of the field that definitions of discourse abound and diverge in their fundamental scope: from minimalist, language-based views such as the description of discourse as “language above the sentence or above the clause” (Stubbs 1993: 12), or as “utterances” (Schiffrin 1994: 39), to text-centered definitions as well as connections of discourse with the social world in its characterizations as “a type of social practice” (Fairclough 1992: 28). With the above in mind, our aim with this handbook has not been to superimpose either artificial boundaries or some kind of coherence on a heterogeneous field but, instead, to offer readers a panorama of current areas of engagement and cross-fertilization. In turn, our decision to opt for “discourse studies” in the title as opposed to “discourse analysis” reflects our wish to avoid identification with a traditional linguistic focus on “discourse” as a method of analyzing language-in-text. Such a disciplinary focus has often meant that emphasis is placed on specific approaches seen as foundational in the development of the field (for example, speech act theory, systemic-functional grammar, text-linguistics, etc.) at the expense of acknowledging that traditional ways of segmenting and labeling “discourse analyses” have diminishing resonance or relevance in the face of emergent research areas and new methodological combinations (for example, corpus-based critical discourse analysis).

In light of the above, the remit and organization of this handbook have stemmed from our belief that long-standing differentiations within the field in terms of traditional schools of thought and approaches (for example, conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, pragmatics, systemic functional grammar, text-linguistics) or in terms of different methodological orientations (experimental, ethnographic, quantitative, qualitative, etc.) do not do justice to its evolution, its porous boundaries or indeed the synergies and intersections that have developed in the last two decades. As we hope to show, discourse analytic studies have experienced a productive merging of interests amongst different perspectives and trends, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, an exponential growth in works that draw on and bring together traditionally distinctive and separate approaches. For example, critical discourse analysis is often merged and combined with ethnographic approaches and corpus linguistics (for example, see Chapter 4 by Fabricio and Moita-Lopes, Chapter 9 by Hart and Chapter 27 by Björkqvall) in ways that would have been unthinkable in the past; discourse studies in digital environments combine qualitative perspectives with big data analysis (see, for example, Chapter 5 by De Fina and Georgakopoulou and Chapter 8 by Ancarno); and multimodal approaches to data have been adopted within a variety of discourse analytic frameworks such as conversation analysis and translanguaging (for example, see Chapter 12 by Tan, O'Halloran and Wignell and Chapter 18 by Tong King Lee and Li Wei). New approaches such as linguistic landscapes or the analysis of digital surveillance also combine qualitative and quantitative methodologies (see, for example, Chapter 14 by Seargeant and Giaxoglou and Chapter 32 by Jones). At the same time, new theoretical and analytical challenges have emerged in the last two decades, not least as a result of the increased mediatization of social life. This has made apparent the need for well-established approaches to rethink, reconceptualize and update assumptions long held by discourse analysts. Examples of these are the recent attempts to develop a conversation analysis fit for online environments or the growth of journals and publications dealing with discourse and semiotic practices in digital environments. These attempts are often framed within the turn to materiality and posthumanist approaches to discourse (see Part III) that problematize and destabilize conventional definitions of discourse and the role of language in them. Awareness of the importance of mobility in contemporary societies has also impacted on how discourse analysts think about the ways in which communicative events are organized, communities are formed and function, and identities are expressed and negotiated, bringing to light the importance of different types of connection at a variety of scales (see Part IV). Connectivity and the ubiquitous merging of texts with other semiotic systems and embodied activities have pushed the boundaries of discourse analysis even further. In addition, the study of discourse as a means of reproducing or challenging social inequalities and its pivotal role in issues

of social justice, inclusion and diversity, rather than being a concern in the interdisciplinary “margins” of the area, has become inherent to many of the topics under study, rendering previous distinctions between “critical” and “descriptive” discourse analyses problematic (see Part V).

Our aim has been to register and contribute to trends such as those just mentioned and, in the process, to reflect on the impact of rapid social and technological changes on the study of discourse and the redrawing of disciplinary boundaries. In this sense, this handbook does not aim at being comprehensive; rather, it is intended to be representative of twenty-first-century concerns of discourse studies. Besides giving space to new trends in discourse analysis, we have also ensured inclusion of approaches that are brought together by a focus on discourse practices and the study of concrete contexts, thus paying special attention to orientations focused on participants and their own ways of organizing discursive events and activities. We highlight the main trends and ideas that run through this vast production of research in discourse studies in the introductions to the handbook’s parts.

The handbook is divided into six parts: Part I, *(Con)Textualizing Discourses*, is composed of chapters that provide critical presentations and discussions of some key ways in which different types of context have been theorized and incorporated into discourse studies, whilst problematizing and updating certain long-standing assumptions that are lacking in explanatory power in the era of digital media and globalization. Part II, *Perspectives and Modes of Analysis*, is devoted to questions regarding methodologies, data and units of analysis seen from different traditions, from conversation analysis to poststructuralism. In Part III, *Discourse Materialities and Embodiment*, the focus is on the relationships amongst discourse, embodiment and the material world. Contributors reflect on the implications of incorporating the environment, material objects and the body into the analysis of communication. Part IV, *(Trans)Locations and Intersections*, is concerned with the manifold ways in which mobility has impacted on methods of analysis and theorizations about identities and language practices in discourse studies. Part V, *Ethics, Inequality and Inclusion*, discusses justice and (in)equality issues from different perspectives in a variety of institutional domains. In Part VI, *Discourse, Publics and Mediatization*, contributors bring to the fore the impact of different kinds of discourse on public life in areas such as politics, the private and public sector, and digital communication.

This handbook would not have been possible without our contributors sharing our vision about an inclusive, interdisciplinary field of discourse studies: their chapters have in our view pushed boundaries beyond our expectations. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of Andrew Winnard, our commissioning editor, who was very convincing about the need for this handbook. Many of our ideas about what might work as part of such a collection, what should be included and in what spirit have been shaped by our long-standing engagement with the field as teachers of BA

and MA modules, supervisors of PhD students and with colleagues within the Centre for Language, Discourse and Communication at King's College London and the Initiative for Multilingual Studies, the Italian department and the Linguistics department at Georgetown University. You are too many to mention by name, so please forgive a collective but heartfelt thank you! Finally, our thanks go to Jeremy Wegner and Dr. Anda Drasovean for their valuable editorial assistance in the early and the final stages of this handbook, respectively.

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