

# Discourse Analysis

Second Edition



**Barbara Johnstone**



**Blackwell  
Publishing**

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SECOND EDITION

*Barbara Johnstone*



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# Discourse Analysis

# Introducing Linguistics

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This outstanding series is an indispensable resource for students and teachers – a concise and engaging introduction to the central subjects of contemporary linguistics. Presupposing no prior knowledge on the part of the reader, each volume sets out the fundamental skills and knowledge of the field, and so provides the ideal educational platform for further study in linguistics.

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**to my teachers**

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# Preface to Second Edition

This new edition incorporates changes in every chapter. In chapter 1 there is now an extended discussion of the use of large corpora as data for discourse analysis. In chapter 2 the discussion of grammatical gender in French has been expanded and clarified. I am grateful to Maeve Conrick for pointing me to sources about the feminization of professional titles in Canadian French. There is also a new section on cognitive metaphor in this chapter. Chapter 4 has new sections on indexicality, stance and style, and social and personal identity. In chapter 5 the discussion of intertextuality has been broadened to include interdiscursivity, and in chapter 6 there is a new section on the analysis of multimodal discourse. Chapter 7 has new material on conversational implicature and an expanded discussion of critiques of speech act theory. I have made hundreds of smaller changes as well. There are added and updated theoretical overviews, examples, and citations throughout the book, and outdated discussion question texts have been removed or replaced.

In preparing this new edition I have benefited from comments and suggestions from students and colleagues at Carnegie Mellon University and elsewhere, as well as suggestions from a number of anonymous reviewers of the first edition. Since 1997, the English Department at Carnegie Mellon University has been a supportive place to work. I am grateful to all, and to



the editors and other specialists at Blackwell Publishing who have made the process go as smoothly as possible. I am also grateful to the many people who have taken the time, at conferences and in emails, to tell me they liked the book. I would not have undertaken a revision without their encouragement.

# Preface to First Edition

This book is intended to be a first-level text for undergraduates and beginning graduate students taking their first (or only) course about discourse. The subject matter of discourse analysis is vast – “language in use,” as Brown and Yule (1983) put it, “utterances,” according to Schiffrin (1994), “verbal communication” for Renkema (2004) – and most discourse analysts would be hard pressed to describe what, if anything, makes discourse analysis a discipline. Yet discourse analysis is implicitly treated as if it were a discipline in texts that are organized as a series of overviews of research topics (institutional discourse, discourse and gender, narrative, media discourse, and so on) or theories (pragmatics, Conversation Analysis, politeness theory, and so on). The approach I take in this book is different. I treat discourse analysis not as a discipline (or as a subdiscipline of linguistics) but as a systematic, rigorous way of suggesting answers to research questions posed in and across disciplines throughout the humanities and social sciences and beyond. In other words, I see discourse analysis as a research method that can be (and is being) used by scholars with a variety of academic and non-academic affiliations, coming from a variety of disciplines, to answer a variety of questions.

For this reason, this book is meant to encourage students not to think of discourse analysis as a collection of facts or canonical studies or as a body



of theory. As we will see, discourse analysts set out to answer many kinds of questions about language, about speakers, and about society and culture. However, they all approach their tasks by paying close and systematic attention to particular situations and particular utterances or sets of utterances. This book attempts to separate the techniques of discourse analysis clearly from its results, trying to make sure that students understand and practice the former before concentrating on the latter. This will, I hope, help alleviate a problem I have had again and again in teaching discourse analysis – that of ending up with students who are fascinated by the results of sensitive analyses of discourse but unable themselves to perform analyses that go much beyond paraphrase. Discourse analysis, as I approach it here, is an open-ended heuristic, a research method consisting of a set of topics to consider in connection with any instance of discourse. This heuristic can help insure that discourse analysts are systematically paying attention to every possible element of the potential meaning of a stretch of talk or writing: every kind of context, every resource for creativity, and every source of limitation and constraint on creativity. My focus is thus less on providing detailed descriptions of the results of discourse analysts' work than on asking students to think systematically about a variety of sources of constraint on and creativity in discourse, a variety of reasons why spoken utterances and written texts have the meanings and uses they do. Discussion questions which in many cases ask readers to think about what they and other people in their field do or might do with discourse analysis, as well as ideas for small research projects using discourse analysis, are interspersed throughout the chapters.

Except for the first and the last, the chapters in this book are self contained, so they could be handled in any order. The order I have selected reflects a combination of what I have found students' interests and expectations to be. People often come to language study because their attention has been captured by the ways in which language, culture, and the world seem to be intertwined. (This can happen, for example, when one studies a foreign language or travels to a foreign place.) This is why I have put the chapter about discourse and world directly after the introduction. People expect language study to be about structures and rules, so the chapter about discourse and structure is also close to the beginning. No textbook author can expect to control how his or her book is used. I would like, however, to urge that readers of this book touch on every chapter in it. To pick and choose among the ways in which discourse is multiply constrained and enabled would be contrary to the overall purpose of the book, because it would encourage the kind of one-dimensional approach to explaining texts against which this book constitutes an argument.

Each chapter ends with a set of suggested supplementary readings. These are not intended as comprehensive bibliographies. Particularly in the areas in which most work is being done at the moment, it would be impossible to have included all the most recent sources, and such literature reviews would



in any case have been outdated by the time the book was published. Instead, I have tried to make suggestions for one or two things a person might profitably read in connection with each section of the chapter. Some are particularly influential studies, often ones done relatively early on. Others are overviews and literature reviews. Instructors could use these lists to choose supplementary readings for the course, and students could use them as a way to get started with background reading in the areas they decide to focus on.

Although some are trained in departments of linguistics, most discourse analysts, at least in the US, do not teach in linguistics departments, but rather in departments of English, anthropology, communication, education, or foreign languages, among others. This means that most students in courses about discourse analysis are not linguistics majors or graduate students in linguistics. I have made every effort in designing this book not to lose sight of this fact. I have tried to avoid the temptation to write at such an advanced level and in such a discipline-specific way that students' frequent suspicions that linguistics is difficult and irrelevant to their other interests are simply confirmed. A course in discourse analysis is an ideal place to encourage interdisciplinary exploration, since discourse is a focus of study in most of the humanities and social sciences. Discourse analysis is practiced in one way or another by at least some people in most of the academic disciplines in which human life is the focus: anthropologists analyze discourse, as do communications scholars, rhetoricians, literary and cultural critics, sociologists, psychologists, geographers, and medical, legal, and educational researchers, among others. Non-linguists can be drawn into the study of language through discourse analysis, and linguists can be drawn into interdisciplinary work. I have written this book specifically with a non-specialist, interdisciplinary audience in mind. Although readers might benefit from having had a general introduction to linguistics first (particularly if the introduction was not limited to formal theories of semantics, syntax, and phonology), I assume that many readers will be newcomers to the field. In the text, I try to explain concepts from linguistics when they first arise. There is a glossary at the end of the book in which terms that may be unfamiliar, as well as specialized uses of familiar words, are briefly defined.

In order to make it possible for instructors to adapt the book to more specialized audiences, some of the discussion questions are geared to teachers and students in one field or another. For example, some discussion questions require students to produce translations or do detailed grammatical analysis. These will obviously not work for students who do not know foreign languages or who are unfamiliar with basic grammatical concepts and terms. Other discussion questions are on topics that will particularly interest people in one field or another: some deal with literary discourse, for example, others with technical genres; some deal with writing and some with spoken language. It is not intended, nor would it be possible, for a class to do all the discussion questions. Students and instructors are meant to develop a system for choosing among them.



Since many of the texts around which the questions revolve were selected and/or collected by my students, there is an inevitable North American bias. I have tried to counteract this to a certain extent in the body of the text by discussing and drawing examples from research done elsewhere. Unfortunately, it has simply not been practical to include anything approaching a representative sampling of work about languages other than English. Good discourse analysis usually cannot be done in translation (although good translation requires careful discourse analysis), and English is the only language all readers of this book will more or less share.

As will be obvious to anyone who knows his work, A. L. Becker has been a major influence on my approach to discourse analysis. I learned from him to think of discourse analysis in heuristic terms, as the systematic consideration of a set of broad analytical *topoi*. Becker has talked about the sources of constraint on discourse in a variety of ways, and the set of topics around which this book is based is not exactly the same as any of his. But the overall structure of this book reflects the way I structure my courses in discourse analysis, and that structure reflects the structure of a course called "Language and Culture" as Becker was teaching it at the University of Michigan in the late 1970s. I was fortunate enough to participate in that course twice, once as a student and once as a teaching assistant, and then to have Becker serve as my dissertation mentor. Since then I have learned more from him in many conversations, including discussions of my ideas for this book. Although I hope it is at least in a general way the sort of book he would write if he were to write a textbook, he of course bears no responsibility for its failings, nor do I claim to be speaking for him in this book. I am also grateful to everyone else whose work I have cited or discussed. I have learned from all of them and I hope not to have misrepresented any of them.

I have also learned from people I have worked with at Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne, Georgetown, Texas A&M, and Carnegie Mellon. Figuring out how to articulate my interests and skills with those of colleagues and students in anthropology, linguistics, literary studies, and rhetoric in four very different settings has encouraged me to learn to think and talk about the ways in which discourse analysis can be an interdisciplinary resource. Students at all four of these places have contributed to this book, both by letting me try out ideas on them in class and by contributing much of the data on which the discussion questions are based. (When the class is small enough, I have each of my discourse analysis students provide his or her own written text or transcript for analysis, and we work with the resulting corpus of student-selected materials all term. I have used many of these materials, with identifying details altered where necessary, in this book.) Since 1998, students at Carnegie Mellon have patiently put up with preliminary typescript iterations of this book as the primary text in my discourse analysis classes. Many have contributed suggestions and corrections, for which I thank them. I am particularly grateful to Denise Wittkofski, who identified the terms that needed to be included in the glossary.



I am also very grateful to the anonymous reviewers of the proposal for this book and, later, the manuscript, and to the editors with whom I have worked at Blackwell Publishers.

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The publishers apologize for any errors or omissions in the above list and would be grateful to be notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in the next edition or reprint of this book.



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