



## Bergamo 2019: 23rd DiscourseNet Conference. Discourse, power and mind: between reason and emotion

<http://dn23.discourseanalysis.net>

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University of Bergamo

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Discourse can be addressed as a vehicle for power, a positioning practice which enlightens the role and the relationship among the speakers. Power is a way of defying and measure relationships and interactions between individuals. These relations and interactions lead one part to affirm its will against another part, no matter on what bases this will is grounded (Weber, 1974).

Human beings tend to adopt specific behaviours and to interact differently according to the social context they are entering. These dynamics of power may be evident in interpersonal interaction and group formation and even more in specific contexts which are characterized by an imbalanced power-holding positioning among the actors (Foucault, 1975). Since it is possible to regard these dynamics as social practices, we can postulate that power dynamics rely also on discourse practices (Fairclough, 1989; Althusser, 1970; Pêcheux, 1971). Language and communication can be seen as tools to define and convey power dynamics, as well as to establish a *status quo*. Hence, discourse practice analysis is a tool to approach and understand the hierarchical relations and positions in different discourse fields.

From a functional-pragmatic point of view, discourse can be seen as a verbal interaction between two actors, speaker and hearer, who are co-present in the same spatial and temporal constellation (Ehlich, 1983/2007). The propositional content of their communication is based on the mental reality of the two actors, and thus on what they already know or need to know. Most of their communication goals depend on the regulation of knowledge asymmetry they

have. Power relationships can be observed in the linguistic analysis of such knowledge exchanges.

Some examples of these relations between discourse and power may be political discourse, where politicians have the means to influence people's way of thinking and impact the life of a community, as well as pedagogical and corporate discourse where differences can be found, *inter alia*, in the degree of knowledge on a specific subject and in the decision-making process. Teachers, employers, team leaders or heads of services are supposed to have a broader knowledge on specific subjects than students and employees, which implies they should be more competent in evaluating ideas and other people's work. Therefore, they occupy a prominent position in decision making and knowledge dissemination processes.

The relationship between discourse and power implies an interaction between the subjects and their selves. Power positions are often held by influencing the judgment of other people, which requires dealing with their minds.

One of the factors to be taken into account when targeting one's self is the complexity of this entity. The self is not only the set of mental schemes and operations that enable an individual to make sense of the world. It is also structured by the living experience of the outer world. This experience of the world is made possible by the physical proprioception of our own body which becomes, in turn, a tool for understanding the outer world through sensations. However, reasoning and sensations aren't the only two ways of knowing and learning. Emotions also play their part in making sense of the world. They connect or distance our body and mind from a given reality according to the positiveness or negativeness a given experience arises in our conscience.

Reasoning, emotions and experiences are all actors of a power relationship: they are part of our judgmental abilities, which means they can play a significant role in power handling and in positioning practice in a power relationship. From a discourse and linguistic point of view, this interaction between mind and power can be analysed through discursive and textual production.

Some topics that may be addressed are:

- argumentation (up to manipulation)
- storytelling
- linguistic construction of emotions and feelings
- sentiment analysis
- linguistic construction of empathy

They all apply to reasoning as well as to emotional and affective dimensions of the self: for instance, storytelling combines some logical skills (the conception of a story as a whole, the cause-effect relationship that grounds the transforming process within a story) with some emotions and feelings due to some form of empathy with one character rather than some negative feelings arisen by characters we despise. In the same way, argumentation, and its extreme form, manipulation, can be based on reasoning as well as pathos and persuasion. These two examples show how reasoning and emotions, rational and irrational, are combined in the process of understanding or making a specific reality

understandable. Without being ascribed to these two specific textual and linguistic constructions, feelings are likely to be present and influence several kinds of discourse, as demonstrated by the sentiment analysis field of research. Moreover, empathy can also be taken into account as a way to analyse the relationship between discourse and power under a linguistic and cognitive perspective. By adopting an empathic attitude, the speakers are able to embrace the perspective of their addressees, i.e. to look at a given situation through the perceptions and/or feelings of another person. The mental operation consists in a displacement (Rabatel, 2017) from the very discursive position of the speakers to a fictive discursive position where the speakers perceive, feel and make sense of a given situation “as if” they were another person (Pinotti, 2011). As a consequence, discursive and linguistic marks of this mental operation may be found in their verbal productions.

The different roles and interactions between reasoning, feelings and emotions we described so far can be applied, to different degrees and in different ways, to several fields of discourse where power may be taken into account, such as:

- Political discourse
- Medical discourse
- Corporate discourse
- Charity discourse
- Media discourse
- Pedagogical discourse and practices
- Academic discourse
- Legal discourse
- Everyday and/or interpersonal interactions

We welcome all proposals for papers addressing the relationship between power and mind, focusing on specific cognitive aspects (such as the verbal expression of reasoning or emotions) and/or linguistic aspects (lexical and syntactic choices, pragmatic features of communication), possibly showing new and original interactions between them. Topics and fields listed above are not exclusive. Given the variety of topics and fields addressed, we also welcome proposals constructing and exploring corpora on multiple levels and through different tools and methodological approaches. For these reasons, statistical, quantitative and qualitative analysis are all welcome, as well as manual and/or computer-assisted analysis carried out in the field of Digital Humanities. We are particularly interested in contributions investigating and combining these methods and approaches in order to discuss not only questions about discourse and power but also the ways to build and analyse corpora on this subject.

### **Submission**

Proposals can be submitted in different languages (English, French, German, Spanish, Italian). Participants are free to choose the language they prefer for their oral communication. In order to guarantee a better comprehension for all the participants, slides should be prepared in English. The abstracts should not be

longer than 250 words. Each proposal will be subject to a blind review by the members of the scientific committee.

### **Proceedings**

Selected papers will be published in a volume and/or journal issue. Further details will be provided.

### **Organizing committee**

- Gabriella Carobbio, Università degli Studi di Bergamo
- Eduardo Chavez-Herrera, University of Warwick
- Cécile Desoutter, Università degli Studi di Bergamo
- Aurora Fragonara, Università degli Studi di Bergamo

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