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EDITORIAL



Cultural Discourse Studies as culturalist approach to communication: object, objectives and tasks

Cultural Discourse Studies (CDS), to which this journal is devoted, concerns itself with human communication, like Communication Studies (CS) in general. That is, it takes as its object of study the social interaction in which people use language and other mediums in context, purposefully and consequentially. In this view, communication is a social process which encompasses multiple elements and dimensions (e.g. language, gesture, technology, channels, time and place). As such, communication functionally constructs reality, exercises power and changes the world.

And yet, different from many common forms in CS, CDS considers communication not as universal or culturally neutral, but as a global system composed of culturally diversified and competing *discourses*. Here discourse refers to the *cultural* form of communication, real or potential, of an ethnically and geopolitically characterized community (say the Chinese/Asian/Developing/Third World, the/Western/Developed World). Culture in this context refers to the particular ways of thinking, speaking and acting, often involving concepts, norms, values, rules, language, ethnicity, religion, traditions, as well as material artefacts, that are embodied in the discursive practice of a community. Thus, culture is the defining feature of a discourse – hence cultural discourse – and of communication more generally; to study discourse and communication, then, is also to study culture.

Any cultural discourse as such has its own system – discourse system. By this is meant the underlying, constitutive configuration of (a) *communicative institutions* (community, organization, platforms, media technology, etc. – ‘the motor system’) and (b) *communicative know-how* (concepts, values, theory, information, principles, tactics, etc. – ‘the nervous system’) which combine to enable, organize and sustain a community’s discursive practice at different levels of abstraction and fields of action. It is the discursive competence of a given community and can have a profound impact on the outcome of its communicative practice.

However, it should be stressed that cultural discourses are not to be taken essentialistically, as if they were homogeneous, reified or fixed. Rather, they should be understood in *differential, dialectic and dynamic* terms: they have dissimilarities both within and without, they are interdependent, and they are subject to change. More importantly perhaps, they are not equal to one another but must be seen in *power* terms: they interact with one another and consequently relations of domination, exclusion, resistance, cooperation, etc. saturate the process.

For practical research purposes, CDS categorizes cultural discourse into six interlocking components, they are: Communicators, Act, Medium, Purpose, History and Culture (CAMPHAC). Specifically, *Communicators* imply: discursive actors as cultural organizations and members, for investigating who is (not) speaking and acting, in what position and capacity and with what characteristics (e.g. world views, ways of thinking, character, past experiences); *Act*: relevant verbal and non-verbal (inter)actions, for studying what is (not) said and (not) done and how, how it is responded to, and what social representation and relation result; *Medium*: the use of symbols, channels and other tools (e.g. specific languages, conventional and new

media, occasion, time and place), for studying what means are (not) used and how (also in relation with language use) and why; *Purpose*: causes, intentions, goals, effects and consequences, for studying why the discursive activity in question has taken place, why it has done the way it did and what impact has resulted; *History*: processes involving the above discursive categories, for studying the nature, change and (ir)regularity of the discourse in question; *Culture*: the sum of features in all the above categories, but in dialectic, differential and power relations to other relevant discourses, for studying the identity, distinction and intercultural relation and standing of the discourse in question. Depending on the particular research purposes and conditions of the data at hand, these categories may be mobilized either in part or as a whole. As should be reminded, too, since these categories are dialectically interconnected, a form of synthesis on the basis of their analyses is required to reach a comprehensive and so practically productive conclusion.

It should be cautioned that, just like the notion of cultural discourse, these analytic categories must not be used as universal tools, either. They are proffered as heuristics, starting points, for studying specific cultural discourses. For, just as the diverse cultural discourses of the global communication system may not have the same nature or shape, so do the analytic categories proposed here. They are then subject to re-adjustment and re-configuration according to the specifics of the particular discourses under investigation.

Profoundly concerned with cultural diversity, dynamic and division of contemporary communication, CDS is designed and dedicated to directing and practicing locally grounded and globally minded, culturally conscious and critical, study of cultural discourses, with a view to fostering cultural innovation in scholarship on the one side and facilitating cultural development, harmony and prosperity in society on the other side. Locally grounded, here, means drawing on native wisdom and scholarship; globally minded, learning from foreign knowledge and expertise. By culturally conscious is meant being attentive to cultural difference and coherence of communication, whereas culturally critical being supportive of cultural harmony and resistant to cultural hegemony. It is in these senses that CDS is *culturalist* in stance: it is an intellectual form of cultural politics in CS.

To achieve the broad objectives set out above, CDS practitioners may and should undertake a spate of interrelated tasks. These are, to name but a few more urgent and badly needed ones, as follows:

- (1) *To discover and deconstruct ethnocentrism in the communication/discourse field with a view to re-balancing and reforming it.* To that end, research questions could revolve round: How does the field of CS constitute ethnocentrism (i.e. cultural domination, prejudice and exclusion), e.g. who are the dominant speakers/gate-keepers and who are excluded? Whose cultural scholarship (theory, concepts, values, methods, topics, questions, etc.) is being universalized and whose marginalized? What is the current order of scholarly communication flow like? What does scholarly ethnocentrism imply for academic innovation and societal development? How are we to transform the current unbalanced order of CS discourse in favour of cultural-intellectual diversity and so creativity for CS?
- (2) *To (re)construct and apply frameworks of cultural discourses of the world's diverse communities, but especially those unfamiliar, repressed or otherwise disadvantaged ones, with a view to reclaiming identity and regaining voice, empowering the communities concerned thereby.* To accomplish this task, efforts may be made to query such questions as: What are the world-views, ways of thinking and acting, norms and values, etc. – the identity and distinctions – of a discourse community concerned like? How are we researchers to (re)construct culturally conscious and critical frameworks of cultural discourses, such as the Asian, African, Latin American or of the developing world as a whole, which have hitherto been under-theorized

and under-studied? What should be the agenda for their scholarship in CS like? What are the philosophical, theoretical, methodological and topical assumptions for researching their discourses? What are the properties, problems and potentials, not just of the culturally dominant discourses, but especially of those that have hitherto been misunderstood, misrepresented or else silenced? How have the disadvantaged discourses been evolving? How are they related and compared with their historical past? How are they related and compared with their cultural others? How are discourses of cultural cooperation, mutual learning and shared benefit constructed?

- (3) *To compare and critique relevant cultural discourses in terms of commonality, difference and interrelations, with a view to enhancing intercultural understanding, equality and cooperation.* This means that research may be rendered into such questions as: What are the common grounds, similarities, equivalences, linkages, differences and contradictions between particular cultural discourses concerned, if any? What are the possible or actual discourses of complementation, cross-fertilization, sharing, helping, collaboration, synergy, solidarity, and otherwise, domination, demonization, coercion, prejudice and exclusion like? How are such discursive acts enabled, formed or changed? How may those positive ones be recreated or promoted and negative ones undermined, reduced, transformed or otherwise prevented?
- (4) *To discover and create new discursive strategies for the world's diverse cultural communities to come together to confront common, pressing issues and crises facing humanity with a view to contributing to the building of a future world of security, peace and prosperity.* To do that, researchers should endeavour to come up with answers to questions like: What are the real, important and urgent problems facing humanity (what about poverty, climate change and nuclear threat) where communication has a role to play? What should the world's diverse communities do in order to ensure continued, egalitarian and sustainable communication? How could communication/discourse studies contribute to solving those existential problems? With the fast scientific and technological advancement (say AI), what would happen to society and to human communication and so what preparation must be made?

These tasks may of course be taken up separately, in tandem, in parallel or ensemble, depending on the particular research aims chosen and the specific research conditions that allow.

Finally, to ensure satisfactory accomplishment of the culturalist ideal and the tasks outlined above, CDS applies a set of action rules to supervise its research practice: (a) not to neglect local context (e.g. concepts, perspectives, norms, values, habits, issues and wishes), (b) not to disregard native resources (e.g. experiences, wisdom and knowledge), (c) not to forget international, intercultural, global and long-term human interests (e.g. not to be inconsiderate about the needs and well-being of the wider world community), (d) not to essentialize discourses, cultures or any other realities (e.g. not to treat them as objective, independent or autonomous), (e) not to monopolize or dominate in scholarship (e.g. not to universalize one's own culture, or repress or marginalize others') and (f) not to be blind to societal-technological advancements (e.g. digitalization, new media, AI and Chat GPT).

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