

# Discourse analysis

A specific function in the overall analysis of  
communication

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# Discourse analysis

- \* A discourse is related to a specific context
- \* A discourse connects a real phenomenon to a specific interpretation
- \* Choices of expressions are related to the discourse such as: words, terms, language markers, style...
- \* A subject such as flooding can be represented in different discourses:
  - A meteorological discourse
  - An environmental discourse
  - A religious discourse

# How does a discourse work?

- \* The discourse is a construction of reality
- \* As soon as we express our interpretation of reality, we define it
- \* The discourse develops and changes with time
- \* Climate change is the greatest challenge of our time
- \* Flooding is seen as a result of climate change and not regulation of rivers, for instance
- \* Once flooding was seen as God's punishment to mankind

# Framing

- \* Defines the problems
- \* Constructs a diagnosis of the reasons behind the problem
- \* Expresses moral judgements
- \* Suggests solutions to the problem

# Central concepts

- \* Antagonisms: one group defines itself in opposition to another group – from this point the discourse will develop on the basis of conflicting interests
- \* Articulation: an overall term covering the way certain terms and objects or events are connected in the text, generating a specific understanding of reality.

# The purpose of discourse is to gain hegemony

- \* Hegemony is to gain ideological leadership by creating alliances between groups to forge consensus
- \* Nodal point is a central word or term. It creates a specific meaning in a given discourse. And generates other associations.
- \* Wife wants to win discourse on tonight's dinner:
  - "I bought some vegetables for tonight's dinner."
  - "Oh, no not again, you promised you would make ham and chips?"
  - "But, Dear, think of your blood pressure, this is much *healthier* for you!"

# Chains of equivalence and difference

- \* Chains of difference (differensskæder): create differences between chains of words, which in turn create **differences** between phenomena e.g.

*science ≠ alternative medicine*

- \* Chains of equivalence (ækvivalensskæder): create **a connection** between different concepts e.g.

*natural environment = healthy*

# floating signifiers

- \* Floating signifiers (flydende betegnere): words that are abstract, positive, but devoid of meaning (through many struggling discourses)

- \* "I'm sick and tired of health arguments."
- \* "Dear, *I only want what's best for you*, you have health issues, not serious ones, but you must *take them into consideration*."

# Discourse analysis is part of an overall analysis of communication

- \* Sender – receiver
- \* Media
- \* Circumstance
- \* Subject
- \* Discourse analysis

# Discourse analysis - what to look for:

- \* Find the main antagonism: how does the sender of the text present “us” as opposed to “them”?
- \* Is there an obvious nodal point?
- \* What chains of equivalence and differences do we observe?
- \* Are there obvious floating signifiers?
- \* How does the text present time and place: what future does it see, and where?
- \* Does the text refer to well known narratives or myths?

# Tactical devices in a discourse

- \* Using “Newspeak”: problems are called challenges, cuts called adjustments etc.
- \* Avoiding the question or implied message:  
“business as usual is not on the ballot paper”
- \* Using universal truths: “when something looks too good to be true – that’s usually because it is”

# Argumentation

- \* How is the argumentation structured in major and minor arguments
- \* Is the argumentation valid? Is there a logical connection between the grounds and the conclusion of the argument?
- \* Are the arguments true? – Are the grounds true, the figures correct?
- \* Are the arguments relevant?

# Rhetorical and stylistic devices

- \* Anaphor
- \* Alliteration
- \* Contrasts
- \* Rhetorical questions
- \* Allusion

# The rhetorical appeal forms

- \* Logos
- \* Ethos
- \* Pathos