Review

Language, Discourse and Social Psychology.
**Ann Weatherall, Bernadette M. Watson and
Cindy Gallois (eds) (2007)**

**New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 309
ISBN 978-1-4039-0505-7**

Reviewed by Ruxandra Comanaru

In this edited volume, Weatherall, Watson and Gallois bring together various advances on language and discourse prevalent in the social psychology literature. The volume consists of an introduction and four parts, reflecting different aspects of these topics and different methodologies employed. The editors acknowledge the vastness of the field in the introduction. The first part of the volume addresses 'Language, accommodation and intercultural encounters' and comprises two chapters. The second part investigates 'Language and discourse in institutional talk' through four chapters. The next two chapters investigate language and discourse in 'Gender and sexuality' studies, while the fourth part focuses on 'Discourse, rhetoric and politics', accounting for the last three chapters of the volume. The wide range of topics covered here, as well as the various methodologies and theories presented make this volume a comprehensive review of some of the most representative topics present in today's investigations of language and discourse in social psychology.

The editors begin by emphasizing the role various sciences have played in the study of language and discourse over the course of time. They argue that it is social psychology, sociology, sociolinguistics, anthropology, and communication studies which have contributed theoretically and methodologically to these pursuits, and that over time, language and discourse have emerged as a subfield

Affiliation

Birkbeck, University of London
email: rcoman01@students.bbk.ac.uk

equinox
www.equinoxpub.com

equinoxonline

of social psychology. The beginnings could be marked by the first conference on language and social psychology in 1979, and the developments are reflected in the presence of various academic associations, journals and handbooks in today's research and academic milieu. The present volume attempts to bring together the latest developments in the fields of language, discourse and social psychology, with an emphasis on the communalities and divisions that the researchers are currently facing. A characteristic of this research is the focus on social interaction, group and intergroup processes, which leads to a negotiation of identity for adapting to the contextual circumstances.

An important contribution brought forth by this volume is the attempt to integrate the two trends in the research on language and discourse: the social psychological quantitative approach and the discursive qualitative approach. The former encompasses research on beliefs and attitudes, outcomes, and identities, using questionnaire and survey data to assess these constructs. The editors label this method 'the social cognitive' approach, while the latter is identified as the 'discursive psychology' approach. Being in opposition or trying to move away from the cognitivist approach and placing the emphasis on the qualitative methods characterize the predominant viewpoint in the discursive research. The editors suggest that although these two lines of research seem to be in opposition with each other, there are some communalities, such as the common emphasis on the 'emergent and interactionally contingent nature of social identities' (p. 4). Nonetheless, they caution the reader about the risks of attempting to combine such distinctive approaches. It is a surprising idea since much of the research employed today in social psychology and other social sciences advocates for the use of triangulation, that is, the mixed methods approach, in order to better understand a particular research topic. The editors of this volume propose that a better stance is to present the various approaches and methodologies in books such as the present one, including in them diverse methodologies and topics from research conducted in various parts of the world. While this is a laudable attempt to cover extensively the research in the field of language, discourse and social psychology, one should not necessarily endorse the editors' view on purist methodology at a time when research in social sciences is moving more and more towards interdisciplinarity, both thematically and methodologically.

The first part of the volume, called 'Language, accommodation and inter-cultural encounters' is comprised of two chapters written by authors well-positioned in the fields of sociopsychological processes, which influence attitudes and behaviours towards languages. The first chapter by Bourhis, El-Geledi and Sachdev provides a comprehensive review of the research concerning 'Language, ethnicity and intergroup relations', as well as new developments in this area of social psychology and language and is divided largely in three

subparts. The authors start by reviewing the literature on the ethnolinguistic vitality of a language group and how the objective and subjective group vitality influence the language behaviour and attitudes of its members. They go on to review the Interactive Acculturation Model, which argues that it is not only the linguistic minority's attitudes that influence the ethnolinguistic vitality of a minority language, but also the majority's view of that language and group, and the interpersonal and intergroup relations between the minority and majority groups in a given context. Bourhis and his colleagues identify various possible routes situated on a continuum, which, they argue, influence the language policies of the majority group in various ways. The review of these various theories provides a detailed account of the factors that influence language use from a policy standpoint, group and intergroup relations, and individual choice.

The following chapter, 'Three variations on the social psychology of bilinguality: context effects in motivation, usage and identity', by Clément, Noels and MacIntyre sets off to investigate the social and cultural factors that might mediate the relations between the bilingual individuals and their motivation to learn or maintain their language, their willingness to communicate (i.e., usage) and their identity. The authors present a review of 'integrativeness' and the various nuances this term has taken over time, and propose that the theories on motivation give a clear representation of the language learners' socio-psychological profile. From these motivational theories, Clément, Noels and MacIntyre describe the developments achieved in better understanding L2 learning through the use of Self-Determination Theory, and the importance of a supportive context for learning the language. The concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) in L2 settings is described as a pyramidal model, which encompasses notions of context (social, individual, affective-cognitive), motivation, self confidence, and desire to communicate with a specific person; these factors lead to WTC and thus to L2 use. The last part of this chapter is concerned with the influences an L2 has on the individual's identity. The authors review previous studies relating to both majority group members learning an L2, and minority group members learning the language of the dominant culture. Thus, if the learner's motivation is supported in a context by the intergroup, interpersonal and individual factors, it will lead to WTC, which in turn will have influences on the person's sense of ethnic identity.

The first two chapters present theories and empirical studies mostly endorsed through quantitative studies conducted through questionnaires and survey methods. The second part of this volume takes on the topics of 'Language and discourse in institutional talk' in four different chapters. These chapters focus on language and linguistic interactions as related to aging and empowerment, illness and support, police-civilian interactions and discourse in children's

helplines. These chapters cover the area of institutionalized talk and the authors attempt to provide an in-depth analysis in each case. The first three chapters have as a starting point the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and the issues presented are within this framework. The last chapter takes a more discursive perspective.

In 'Communication, health and ageing: promoting empowerment', Savundranayagam, Ryan and Hummert propose an examination of the 'role of communication in empowering older adults, especially those with physical, sensory or cognitive impairments' (p. 82), which would be beneficial in communication between them and more powerful adults in health care situations. The authors make the distinction between being passive, assertive, and aggressive in a communicative encounter, and suggest assertiveness as the best strategy to be employed. The older adult is discussed as a care receiver and as a caregiver, and emphasis is put on the environment, which should permit dialogue and active participation in the decisions taken about health care. Savundranayagam and her colleagues recommend that both care receivers and givers promote the empowering of older individuals; they review several ways of using assertiveness and other strategies in order to reach this goal in interactions in the health domain.

In the same line of research, but maybe more general, Chapter 4 focuses on 'Language, discourse, and communication about health and illness: intergroup relations, role, and emotional support'. Watson and Gallois start by emphasizing the broadness and complexity of the topic and proceed to review some of the relevant literature in the field. They support the social psychological procedure of studying language issues from an intergroup and interpersonal perspective, originating from social identity theory and more specifically, CAT. The authors emphasize the lack of theory in health communication and suggest that theories from social psychology would lend themselves nicely to the field of health communication. They also discuss the recent shift in research from the health care practitioner to the patient and the need for more theory-based research in order to better understand the communicative encounters in a dyad in the health care context. The parallel between the health care context and the social psychology of language seems to be beneficial, however, the researchers in this field should occasionally step back and re-examine the relation between theory and practice in order to ensure the connection is still present. There is always a danger of finding false positives when research is driven only by theory and one needs to explore the deductive approach also.

The following chapter, 'Accommodation and institutional talk: communicative dimensions of police-civilians interactions', continues the series of articles emerging from CAT and presents a more in-depth analysis of its application to this specific context. Giles, Hajek, Barker, Lin, Zhang, Hummert and Chernikoff

Anderson begin the discussion with an overview of the research to date in CAT and of the attitudes towards the law enforcement and police (ATP). The presentation of the cross-cultural empirical study regarding young people's ATPs indicates the mediating role that CAT has between ATP and trust in the law enforcement bodies. The power distance in the interactions between the police and civilians is usually perceived as very large, therefore an accommodating approach to the communication strategies employed by both parties of the interactional dyad is essential for avoiding potentially dangerous situations. The authors adapt the focus and conclusions of their large-scale cross-cultural study to fit neatly in this volume.

The last chapter of this section, 'Discursive psychology: mind and reality in practice', provides a different perspective on the study of language and social psychology, that is, the discourse analysis perspective. Potter and Hepburn illustrate their point through the detailed investigation of the discourse strategies during an interaction on the children's helpline. The authors review what DP is, place it in the context of social psychology, sociolinguistics and conversation analysis, pointing out the different trajectory DP has taken in recent years. The systematic approach of DP is pointed out in relation to perception, cognition and emotion, and the children helpline interactions described and analyzed here present the way in which DP 'offers a picture of psychology that is embedded in practices' (p.178). This chapter provides a different and valuable perspective on institutionalized talk, which completes this section of the volume.

The following two chapters are part of the section dedicated to 'Gender and sexuality', however they take very different approaches to the topic. The first chapter, by Murachver and Janssen investigates 'Gender and communication in context' taking thus a more social psychological perspective to gender differences in language use. Their perspective is that gender and other social categories come up in communication and although a certain style does not necessarily predict one's gender, it can be an indication of it. The emphasis however, is on the contextual impact on the use of gendered language, and the authors of this chapter also look closely at how CAT can influence the understanding of gender and language use. They point out the benefits and caveats of this theory for gender communication. Murachver and Janssen present an empiricist approach to this topic, suggesting that CAT cannot strongly predict gender in a particular context and they suggest a new theory is needed, one that will take into account both the individual and the situation where the interaction is taking place.

The other chapter in 'Gender and sexuality' takes a feminist conversation analysis approach to the study of language and gender. Wilkinson and Kitzinger begin by placing their research in context, describing the history of CA, and its usefulness in feminism. The authors go on to explore how we can identify the

'everyday forms of oppression' (p. 206) through the use of CA methodology in different contexts and they emphasize the usefulness of this method in exposing heterosexual and sexist language in our everyday linguistic interactions.

The last part of this volume is dedicated to the study of 'Discourse, rhetoric and politics', and the three chapters that comprise this section focus on contemporary racist discourse, the language of persuasion, and false beliefs promoted by the rhetoric of the authorities. In Chapter 9, Augoustinos and Every take the DP approach to analyze recent discursive practices and how racism is expressed. They talk about the ways in which racism can be unmasked through the use of DP and they point out to the fact that in accusing somebody of being racist needs to be done in a subtle way, and again DP can be a helpful tool. The authors suggest the importance of discursive research on race and racism in societies where these topics are considered taboo, and its usefulness in combating racism.

Bull's chapter on 'Political language and persuasive communication' tackles three aspects of this type of language: equivocation, applause and the use of metaphors in political discourses, and their implications for persuading the audiences. He emphasizes the lack of research in linking political and persuasive language together. Since it is obvious that politicians use language in order to persuade their public and to gain electoral support, Bull advocates for more research to link these linguistic fields.

The last chapter of the book investigates the 'False beliefs and sound arguments promoted by authorities'. Continuing the theme of power and persuasion, Robinson presents the politicians' arguments and discourse from the Thatcher era until Blair's Government and uncovers the lies and myths created by politicians in order to secure their positions. The author brings forth the influence media has on creating alternate realities in the minds of their audience. Robinson recommends sound reasoning and critical thinking and analyzing before accepting something as true only based on the media's or the politicians' portrayal of it. He advocates education and knowledge, rationality and continuous questioning of the truths we are being served as members of a society.

This volume is a comprehensive presentation of the wide range of topics and methodologies employed, and thus stresses the importance of language and discourse research for the study of interpersonal and intergroup interactions. It points out the complexity of these issues, and thus the need for further investigations. It presents recent developments in this field, transference of theories and methodologies from one context to others, empirical and discursive studies, ranging across various topics. Although the authors support the use of one method, be it quantitative or qualitative, researchers should consider if in certain situations, combining these approaches would not be more beneficial and yield a better understanding of the topics at hand.