Interdiscursivity

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Interdiscursivity refers to the heterogeneity of texts, how they fold within them other texts, other utterances, and draw upon multiple discoursal contexts. By taking up the productive interaction between text and discourses, the concept of interdiscursivity proposes an examination of how, on the one hand, discourse is typified and ordered into more or less permeable or hybrid genres, and, on the other, how genres are prescriptively bound to accountable social action across multiple sites.

Building on Bakhtin's understanding of communication as inherently dialogic, constitutive of social life, and essential to its historical coherence, interdiscursivity supplements the transdisciplinary vocabulary of situated accomplishments and rich descriptions of single instantiations. By dislocating terms from the ethnography of communication and its cognate disciplines in the anthropological tradition, as, for example, "speech event" or "verbal performance," it proposes a way to examine linkages in social action (as text) through space, time, and social structuring (such as ideology). The Bakhtinian grounding of interdiscursivity is therefore important in two ways. First, it underscores the *polyphonic nature of communication* or the multiple and heterogeneous voices within a given (isolatable) occasion of interaction. The functional-informational model, according to which communication is seen as the transfer of information from addressor to recipient, is complicated (and rendered more adequate to the analysis of real-life interactions) when it is acknowledged that the *message* is neither a singular noun nor a unified construct. Any utterance is polysemous, that is, having multiple potential meanings and, consequentially, the simplistic notion of "addressor" and "recipient" cannot stand. Second, interdiscursivity is concerned with the *history*—or even historicity—of all texts and utterances. If utterances are suffused or absorbed in time, then they are always "geological" in character that is, semiotically layered—with layers added, or eliminated, historically.

Intuitively, interdiscursivity builds on the notion of intertextuality, precisely in the same way that a discourse may be understood as a complex assemblage of simultaneous and chained linguistic acts, designating a larger field—and an interrelationship across fields of action—than does a text. As Silverstein (2007) puts it, intertextuality and intertexts "are generated in events of communication *through techniques of interdiscursivity*" (p. 7, emphasis added). Much like intertextuality, the concept of interdiscursivity is theorized at the juncture of several disciplines that study language as social action, with the term appearing in discourse studies (discourse analysis [DA] and, from critical linguistics, critical discourse analysis [CDA]) as well as linguistic anthropology, the ethnography of communication, sociolinguistics, and folklore. But a glance

at how interdiscursivity is employed explicitly and proficiently to advance empirical claims yields mixed, if interesting, results. In the special issue of the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* dedicated to interdiscursivity (2005), for instance, the concept is at times treated as synonymous with intertextuality, and at other times is not central, or well-defined. Alternatively, those discussions that are not directly related to interdiscursivity, but rather to the notions of voice, register, semiosis, and even narrative, indirectly reflect on interdiscursivity, perhaps evidencing its broad and fuzzy implications for the analysis of naturally occurring acts of communication. Also interesting is how, in the itself porous domain of discourse studies, explicit treatments of the term fall within the purview of critical discourse analysis, and therefore concerns with hegemony, ideology, power, and a preference for analyses of written texts over conversational exchanges. In order to problematize this state of affairs, the empirical illustrations provided here bridge different disciplines, methodological approaches, and combine both written and spoken utterances.

The analysis of interdiscursivity as the dialectical relations between texts, discourses, and the realm of the social may be fruitfully undertaken by means of three related concepts. The first is that of *ordering*, or orders of discourse, which proposes a way of seeing how semiotic aspects within discourses are employed in dynamics of social legitimation. Discourse types are bound to particular institutional settings or spheres of social life (as, for example, academic, news, medicine, and so on). Because what "typifies" them are conventions, it is interesting to ask how these conventions work in a particular domain. Consider psychotherapy as a discourse, as well as an activity type. As compared to a more (at least at the surface) well-defined questioning activity, as might be a police interrogation, what counts as doing psychotherapy may be largely heterogenous, for a clinical exchange may include various semiotic resources and blur the boundaries between the discursive orders of private confession, education, intervention, and psychiatry, to name a few. How this might occur is exemplified in the following extract, a session between T (the therapist) and C (the mother of a 5-year-old boy):

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(1) Bartesaghi (2005, p. 143)
01        01       T:   Is he mean to people (.) or LEAVE ME ALONE?
02        02       C:   Sometimes.
03        03       T:   So he sounds more irritable than depressed.
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By first, creating a hypothetical utterance in the informal register, second, attributing it to the boy as reported speech recontextualized from what one may imagine is the home, or school, or a domain of experience not actually witnessed by the therapist, third, comparing this utterance to "mean," or another category of attributed and putatively dissimilar behavior presented in an informal register (all in line 1), the therapist is able to secure what in line 3 his uptake suggests is enough of an admission on the mother's part (line 2). T can now move to legitimate the beginnings of a therapeutic diagnosis. Thus, by means of proficiency in multiple discursive orders that are "therapy," such as child speech, reported speech, home, the playground, parent–child interaction, the diagnostic, the therapist is able to access and realize what lies behind "sounds": an institutional and intertextual order of signification.

As orders of discourse with a stable set of conventions, *genres* (such as a commercial, a dissertation, a scientific article, an interview)—which is the second relevant concept—are "the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 65), for changes in the way they are produced and consumed signal changes that are both linguistic and social. Fairclough's (2003) discussion of genres and how these may be chained is particularly good, especially with respect to his focus on how genres are bound to activity types, thus constraining options for the discursive performance of social life. As social members acknowledge and avail themselves of genre conventions, they employ strategies of interdiscursivity, to both affiliate with discourse communities by competent use of these strategies, and to exploit sequences in a chain for their own purposes. Applicants to a tenure track university position, for example, may compose application letters in accordance with academically ratified identities of the productive teacher-scholar, listing their accomplishments in conventional ways. By making proper use of this genre, they draw from what comes before in the chain, to secure what comes after, namely, the positive uptake of the hiring committee. This also means that applicants are counting on the committee's rewarding them for appropriate use of conventions by ironicizing them and being willing to "see" beyond them.

Noting that professional communities are discourse communities held together by conventions of writing, Berkenkotter's (2001) study takes on psychotherapeutic writing as a professional exemplification of genre systems, that is, intertextual chains that both constitute and are constituted by institutional practices. Much like the sociology of science's study of the assemblage of texts, practices, and human and nonhuman agents in the production of scientific findings, the notion of genre system interdiscursively links intertexts and practices; it seeks to show how institutional genres are recontextualizations of the everyday activities that perform institutional life. The subject of Berkenkotter's piece is the recontextualization of therapists' notes from a clinical session into a diagnostic protocol, and the intertextual linkages and interdiscursive strategies involved in these transformations. The heterogeneous therapeutically produced diagnostic text, she argues, starts as a fuzzy problem account composed of a multiplicity of blended, explicit, and elided voices, and discourse types in text–context relationships that are reformulated into ordered and bounded therapist-driven discourse for therapist-designated institutional goals. Berkenkotter's point, that the text–context relationship is misunderstood if taken in terms of a container metaphor, is well taken. Rather, she suggests that interdiscursivity be used as a productive tool to study the "complex, historically mediated text/context relationships" (2001, p. 343).

By way of discourse analysis and membership categorization analysis, Bartesaghi and Bowen's (2009) study of interviews with Jewish Holocaust survivors introduces the third concept, *hybridity*. History, the authors claim, is a metadiscourse made up of several other discourses that are collaboratively produced in intertexts, such as interviews, questioning protocols, and documents of various kinds. By means of an analysis of how interview questions acquire Jewish respondents capable of re-membering the Holocaust, thus granting them the status of survivor and their answers that of Holocaust memory, Bartesaghi and Bowen show how Holocaust interview questions are

pragmatically complex, multifunctional, and layered. Questions are at once conversational and informal, intimate and therapeutic, terse and directive, asking respondents to remember facts and dates that are interruptive to the narrative itself as well as not part of their own evaluation, and drawing on psychocognitive notions of trauma in order to "re-member" (as in piece together) an already known correct historical timeline. Interviewers' deployment of various discursive styles, registers, and institutional objectives folded into utterances that are grammatically structured as uniquely designed and personal are evidence of how hybridity functions to constrain respondents' (correct) answers, while giving the impression of encouraging their *own* story.

Wodak's discourse-historical approach (in Wodak & Meyer, 2001/2005) is an eclectic, methodologically synthetic framework—abductively moving from text to ethnography, to theory, to analysis—that combines close reading of texts through systemic functional linguistics and attention to interdiscursive strategies in a historical context, in order to ask questions about power and sociocultural change. Wodak's analysis of Austrian immigration policy documents shows how the Austrian government makes use of various discursive genres across textual chains to legitimate its authority to deny immigration rights to Turkish nationals. Examples of "good reasons" to deny immigration requests are lodged in discourses of morality, objectivity, criminality, and even caring. The textual chains amount then to an *interdiscursive assemblage*, which eventually serves the state in denying immigration rights.

Noy's ethnographic studies of performance and the enmeshment of discourses (and texts) within the highly ideological context of national commemoration in Israel are a clear example of interdiscursivity that addresses notions of genre and orders. Examining how discourses are made to circulate, or alternatively sometimes drift, and how and by which agents they are dialectically exported and imported between various sites and occasions of enunciation, Noy's (2008, 2009) focus is on visitors' comments in visitor books at a symbolic site of national commemoration, located in Jerusalem. His analysis suggests that one of the main features that establishes visitors' texts as highly ideological, public performances is that they cite canonical discourse. In this way, the texts that visitors produce are re-citations and therefore re-entextualization of hegemonic discourse, which eventually amount to a *re*telling of either the site's commemoration narrative or an alternative interpretation thereof. Comments of visitors are variably genred—or intergenred—and amount to public performances that are indexically tied to the national sphere and the national narrative of commemoration that the site narrates. Noy's studies also show how writing in the ideological visitor books can serve as an occasion where additional (or alternative) discourses are introduced and can create a hybrid discourse that brings together national and religious terms and meanings.

(2) Noy (in press)

One of the visitors inscribes a very short, Hebrew text in the visitor book, containing the three-letter acronym of the formal title of the Israeli army: I.D.F. ('Israeli Defense Forces'. The Hebrew letters are: Tsadi, He, Lamed). The acronym is inscribed vertically, and this layout allows the visitor to re-use each letter as the first letter of a short text that is inscribed horizontally. The horizontal text is not "Israeli Defense Forces." Rather, an alternative text is offered, for

which the same letters serve as acronym, and it is embedded in religious
discourse and conveyed in religious vernacular. The first letter, Tsadi,
begins the text "Righteous in their deeds" (Tsadikim bema'aseyhem), the
second letter, He, begins the text "The State exists in their merit"
(Hamedina kayemet bizxutam), and the third letter, Lamed, begins the text
"Forever we shall remember their courageous deeds" (Letamid nizkor
et ma'asey gvuroteyhem). In this way, the formal text for which the acronym
I.D.F. stands – and the secular-national discourse within which it is
embedded – are replaced, and religious discourse is offered to account for
the actions and meanings associated with the Israeli army. There is a
hybridity of discourses at stake, as well as a ordering or reordering of
hegemonic national discourse. The extract also shows how multimodal
productions help interject discourses and sustain interdiscursive
(multimodal) utterances; multimodality conveniently facilitates multi-
discursivity.

Conclusion

This article discusses interdiscursivity as an analytical concept that serves to unpack
discursive occasions, showing how they are power/ideologically ridden and intercon-
nected to amount to a higher order, multidiscursive assemblage. The concept's meanings
and uses are presently not as clear as they can be, partly because they are associated with
different disciplinary perspectives (mainly discourse analysis and linguistic anthropol-
ogy), and partly due to the concept's dual uses, as both means for analysis of discourse
and as a description of the state of the same. The definition given here surveyed the
related concepts of ordering, genre, and hybridity, and demonstrated how interdiscur-
sivity can be illuminated by these concepts. In future research interdiscursivity should
be explicitly addressed and discussed as part of discursive and textual analysis whereby
its analytic potential to unravel the multiplicity of actual occasions of interaction, and
the relation between text, discourse, and the social will emerge.

SEE ALSO: Ethnography of Communication; Ideology in Discourse; Intertextuality;
Multimodal Discourse Analysis; Power and Discourse; Reported Speech

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