Preface

Discourse analysis (DA) is the study of language in use with descriptions of language forms and patterns of interaction taking into account the contexts in which they occur. The application of discourse analysis in research involves the examination of textual data and the general principles of interpretation by which people normally make sense of interactions.

Within the framework of DA, there is a typology of approaches for examining different discourse aspects: contextual, critical, linguistic, and interactional. The contextual approach examines language use in specific social or cultural contexts. The critical approach studies language patterns and related social institutional practices that empower and/or limit what people do and say. The linguistic approach studies language itself and variations in language systems in different settings. The interactional approach focuses on the activity of language use and the impact of context on shaping meaning and patterns of use. The context includes the immediate in-text situation of utterances as well as the technology medium and environment.

The advent of computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies prompted research in computer-mediated discourse (CMD) or electronic discourse which is the communication product of human interaction via networked computer systems. The study of CMD is located in the field of CMC and distinguished by its focus on language and language use in computer networked environments, and by its use of DA methods to address that focus.

The emergence and rapid acceptance of Web 2.0 technologies present challenges in terms of understanding the new communicative contexts and the interaction of various media in shaping meaning and patterns of use. Moreover, CMC research in education, culture and society that utilize DA methods reflect a concentration on descriptive studies of the structural features of computer-mediated language while the implications of language change for theory and practice can be developed further. Also, current research has focus on the analyses of discursive products from a single communication technology while CMC increasingly co-exist on a single platform as convergent media computer-mediated communication (CM-CMC).

In response to such changes, many advances in DA methodology have been made in terms of data gathering, transcription techniques, data interpretation and ethical considerations in the new media and multimode contexts. At this point in time, there is a need to critically reflect on the recent advances in the theory and application of electronic DA methods from empirical studies, consolidate the methodological innovations that had emerged from the new communication contexts and identify what works and what does not.
The purpose of this book is to disseminate the challenges and successes in the search for innovative and effective methods of DA for understanding the new communicative contexts and the interaction of various media in shaping meaning and patterns of language use. Hence, this edited book showcases empirical studies, using qualitative, quantitative and mixed methodologies, where the application of DA methods to electronic discourse is rigorously grounded in theoretical frameworks and highlights research on the application of DA methods to electronic discourse from new media that consider implications for theory and practice, hence going beyond structural descriptions of language.

The book is organized into three sections with 20 chapters. The first section – *Electronic Educational Discourse: Developments in Theory, Methods and Applications* - consolidates studies on the application of DA methods in e-learning contexts with implications for constructivist theory, online pedagogy, instructional design and collaborative learning.

The second section - *Electronic Discourse Analysis: Innovations in Theory, Methods and Applications in Research on Society and Culture* - present cases where DA methods were applied in research on society and culture with implications for issues of power, identity and gender. In the final section – *Future Trends: Emergent Method for the New Media*, readers are presented with particular examples of innovative methodological advances in DA and the experimental use of Web 2.0 tools in educational and social research that outline emerging trends. The chapters provide suggestions for future research within this rapidly changing discipline.

This book is distinguished from other publication available on DA. For instance, Crystal’s (2001) *Language and the Internet* provides a broad background to Internet language use and change. It focuses on language structure description hence more appropriate for a readership of applied linguists. The discourse data in the examples were products from early, well-established CMC technologies such as email, MUDs, MOOs, chat groups. In contrast, this book showcases research on application of DA methods to data from new media that go beyond structural description of language. Hardy and Bryman’s (2004) *Handbook of Data Analysis* focused on approaches used in qualitative data analysis such as content analysis, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, grounded theory. The forms of discourse data, procedures for data gathering, processing and transcription were based mainly on data from face-to-face social interactions. However, this edited book includes research cases on electronic discourse, treatment of online interactional contexts and methods for handling such data that were not covered in Hardy and Bryman.

In addition, van Leeuwen’s (2008) *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis* focuses on only one method in analysis of discourse - critical discourse analysis (CDA) - but this approach has very distinct ideological assumptions and is mainly adopted for examining written texts and spoken words to reveal issues of power relations and redressing power imbalances. In comparison, this edited book is broader in the treatment of methods and encompasses educational and social research where other DA methods were applied.

This book can certainly be differentiated from available published works in this field since the contributions in this edited book represent the cutting edge of current research in the theory and application of electronic discourse analysis in the fields of education, society and culture. This collection of empirical studies introduces innovative methodological advances in DA that outline areas for future work for academics, students and researchers in the fields of human computer interaction, linguistics, education, sociology and organizational communication.
Finally, the book includes recent research and application of DA methods in educational and social contexts that will appeal to professionals working in the field of technology supported work groups and the management of organizational communication. We hope that this publication will inspire researchers to push the boundaries in the field of electronic discourse analysis.

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**REFERENCES**

