Discourse as Cultural Struggle

Edited by Shi-xu

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Discourse Studies and Cultural Politics: An Introduction

Shi-xu

In mainstream (critical) discourse analysis/studies, discourse is usually understood as a linguistic, meaningful activity that is different in kind from, though causally related to, context, the elements of which range from the person, the mind, the medium, the situation, to society and culture. Moreover, theory of discourse and approaches to it, which are largely of Western origin and orientation anyway, are presented as more or less universally applicable, implicitly or explicitly. So it may be observed that what practitioners mainly do is description or analysis of "discourse" or text or talk, and, to a much lesser extent, explanation in functional relationship between form/structure and meaning/function, or text/talk and context. And, they would use the same kind of theoretical perspective and the same mode of research, irrespective of the different cultural backgrounds involved. Implicit in such disciplinary practice, it should be noted, too, is the notion that the researched discourse is treated as detachable from the researcher and, further, that the basic nature and structure of discourse are the same across human cultures.

The authors of this volume do not subscribe to this standard, Western, dominant paradigm. Instead, we try to steer a new, thoroughly culturalist direction in discourse research. That is, we go beyond the a-culturalist and binary tradition and explore human discourses, including their contexts, as dialectic wholes. The central thesis that we want to establish in and through this book is that human discourses in the contemporary world, lay and professional alike, are *sites of cultural contest*. That is, they are saturated with power and history and therefore diversified, dynamic, and competing. Because of this, new, locally grounded and globally minded perspectives and techniques must be reconstructed in order to make proper sense of culturally different, "other" discourses, especially those of hitherto neglected, marginalized, repressed, non-Western/Third-/Fourth-World groups and communities, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to help promote new discourses of cultural cohesion and

progress. For this reason, we entitle the present volume *Discourse as Cultural Struggle.*

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I first consider the larger cultural-intellectual context and the practical international situation that will, it is hoped, show the deeper and broader significance of the present endeavor. Then, I go on to outline a general theoretical and methodological framework that will prepare the way for the various kinds of culturalist discourse studies to follow. This consists mainly of a culturalist reconceptualization of discourse and relevant philosophical and procedural principles. At the end of the chapter, I briefly introduce the contents of each chapter contained in the volume.

Disciplinary and everyday discourse in contemporary culture

What I pointed to above regarding the notion of discourse is only part of a much larger, cultural-intellectual context that has been behind the present project: the lived but ignored fact that international scholarship on discourse, and for that matter, language and communication, has been a mainly West-dominated enterprise and, consequently, culturally univocal and monological in nature rather than pluralistic and reflexive (Ashcroft et al. 1989; CCCS 1982; Césaire 1972; Dissanayake 1988; Fanon 1986; Foucault 1972, 1980; Hall 1999; Kincaid 1987; Wa Thiong'o 1986; Said 1978). Often, practitioners appear to be pursuing "integration," "standardization," and "universality" of theories, methods, and research questions. However, if we examined the origins, the contents, the rhetoric, and the institutional basis of their discourse, then it would become clear that such pursuits are inalienably connected with the cultural interests of knowledge and information control and ultimately cultural power and domination, and that the achievement of such interests is enabled largely through the political economy of metropolitan academic institutions, international publishing and marketing, digital media, and global travels.

This oft-obscured, neo-colonialist discourse of knowledge and scholarship, I should like to stress, is not restricted to just particular locales, say North America or Europe. It would be equally erroneous to conceive of the discourse as reducible to singular individuals or institutions. What I am referring to here is a historically evolved, continued, and dominant pattern of speaking that is being circulated transnationally, or simply, globally. This implies that, just as there are critical discourses from within the West opposing its culturally repressive discourse, there are also within the non-Western world voices complicit with that dominant discourse, conscious or inadvertent. It is precisely this globalized dominant discourse, across the borders of nations, race, and ethnicities, that characterizes the expansionist nature of the discourse.

And yet we cannot wholly understand the repressive nature of this scholarly discourse unless and until we also see, on the other end of the power continuum,

the virtual "aphasic" state of the scholarly communities in the non-Western, Third, and Fourth Worlds. The professional groups in these subordinate, postcolonial or otherwise disadvantaged places have few or even no resources to reconstruct their own cultural-intellectual heritages, maintain their own identity, or make their voices heard. Effectively, the dominant, the complicit, and the silenced groups consciously or inadvertently produce and reproduce a coordinated, systematic, and global discourse of academic hegemony.

This unhappy state of the international discourse scholarship has broader consequences on the development of human knowledge and, ultimately, on the survival of human cultures. For, when such a culturally unbalanced communication system, as is manifested in the powerful cultural symbolic practices of (text)books, journals, conferences, research projects, classroom teaching, and so on, keep producing and reproducing culturally singular and perhaps circular forms of understanding, pre-empting the cultural diversity of knowledge (seeking) and invalidating the relevance of dialogue and critique between culturally different intellectual traditions thereby, genuine intellectual growth and innovation become difficult, if not impossible. By continuing to repress culturally different communities and their discourses, such exclusive discourse may beget resistant forms of discourses from the marginalized groups, causing academic tension and rift. But more seriously perhaps, such mainstream academic institutions will not make any better but actually worsen the existing antagonisms between human cultures and civilizations in the everyday world, since they are doing anything but preserving and encouraging cultural diversity and equality in their field of expertise. This leads to my next concern.

The changed and changing everyday context of our professional work constitutes another, no less significant, motivating factor for the present collection. That is, as a result of the accelerated globalization in communication, finance and trade, international politics, and so on, the world's divergent communities and populations are becoming more and more interconnected and to some extent interpenetrated and hybridized. The discourses from the non-Western, Third, and Fourth World countries must not be ignored any longer or still seen from traditional, culturally singular perspectives. Culturally more pluralistic visions and broader scopes need to be adopted. At the same time, the world's groupings, such as the North and South, the (American) West and the Rest, East and West, the centers and margins, and so on and so forth, and hence their voices, are getting, not any more harmonious but even more in discord. Amid this neo/postcolonial disorder, as should also be noted, marginalized and silenced cultural communities aspire to reassert their voices and identities and engage in genuinely intercultural dialogue and critique. The speech of Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez at the UN World Summit in 2005 and the protests during the WTO meeting in Hong Kong in 2005 are only more dramatic manifestations in recent times.

Such paradoxical cultural dilemmas call for concerted, reflexive, and systematic efforts on the discourse researchers. We should and are able to help transform the situation, beyond existing descriptive, explanatory, interpretative, or critical modes of research. For one thing, the global alienation and antagonism are not merely some immovable facts for discourse analysts or critics to analyze or criticize; the reality of discourse and the discourse of reality can themselves be changed. For another, researchers and the researched are intermeshed, and the former should and can take the initiative to proactively and creatively participate in changing the latter. How the discursive transformation can become possible and effectively done is one of the central questions that the contributors to this book try to answer.

Discourse as cultural struggle

The central point that the present volume attempts to make is that human discourses, involving different communities of speakers and different historical backgrounds, are neither uniform in form or function nor equal in status and relationship to merit the current dominant trend of universalization of (critical) discourse analysis/studies in the international academic and educational communication system. Rather, they are culturally differentiated, mutually competing, as well as interpenetrated (Asante 1998; Batibo 2005; Canagarajah 2002; Chen and Starosta 2003; Cronin 2003; Duszak 1997; Giroux 2005; Hall and du Gay 1996; hooks 1991; James 1993; Lauf 2005; McDermott 1994; Miike 2004; Pennycook 1998; Phillipson 1992; Said 1993; Shiva 1993; Tu and Tucker 1998; Van Dijk 1993). In this section, I try to tease out the whys and wherefores (see also Shi-xu 2005).

First, the notion and the term "discourse" are not universally recognized and applicable. Just as different cultures may have variable conceptions of language and communication and their relations, so they will have a similar situation regarding "discourse." Although the Western form of speaking about discourse is dominant, there is nothing to suggest that it is the singular, comprehensive one that exists. In the Chinese language, for example, there is a rich collection of categories and concepts to do with discourse: *shuofa, kanfa, guandian, lundian, tanhua, biaoshu, huayu* . None of them has an exact correspondence with "discourse," though each may in one way or another reflect the meaning of discourse (*huayu* is merely a recent professional convention for the direct translation of "discourse"). My point here is not that we must not use the term and concept when studying non-Western language and communication but that, at the meta-discourse, scholarly level, the notion of discourse is a contested one and that local cultural realities and peculiarities need to be taken into account in any adequate understanding. This point is particularly clear if and when one can think and speak from the perspective of

those who suffer from the domination of "universal," "general," "integrated," or indeed "inter/multidisciplinary" discourses.

Second, there can be a diversity of discourses with different or even mutually exclusive contents by different groups and communities in contemporary culture. For some, discourses about the world market, leisure, tourism, individuality, fashion, art, health care, higher education, and the media are part of their lives on the one side. For others, it is the discourses of hunger, homelessness, unemployment, poverty, AIDS, and illiteracy that are constituents of daily existence on the other side. That is, certain discourses are restricted to particular communities but unknown or denied to others. It may be added at this point that many discourses of the local, native, social, ethnic, gendered concerns, issues and voices, especially of the Third and Fourth Worlds as well as women, homosexuals, ethnic minorities, working or unemployed classes, for instance, have yet to be rediscovered and understood.

Thirdly, about the "same" or similar topic, there can be different, incompatible, and even opposing discourses. Competing discourses over Iraq, Palestine, democracy, justice, globalization, the UN reform, human cloning, abortion, and so on, are some of the outstanding examples. Similarly, human discourses embody divergent patterns of interaction; some discourses may be more individualistic, instrumental, analytical, Eurocentric, and low-context whereas others may be more other-relational, harmony-oriented, intuitive, holistic, and high-context. Only, the voices of certain groups, communities, and institutions tend to be louder than those of others; certain ways of talking are exalted as standard and others as deviant. The very act of proclaiming some discourse to be the norm, dismissing alternative ones or undermining them, already indicates the presence of the cultural diversity and struggle of human discourses. Over the sovereignty return of Hong Kong to China, for instance, it is paradoxically not the voices of native Hong Kong or China that get more represented in the international communication system than those of the Western world, but rather the other way around (Shi-xu et al. 2005).

Fourthly, there is a historical dimension to the cultural diversity and struggle of human discourses. Human groups and communities do not speak the same across history: their discourses evolve and often become discontinued through time (Foucault 1972). More fundamentally, human communities and their discourses have the intrinsic critical consciousness to re-emerge from history and create historically better or preferred versions of reality and ways of acting. Therefore, it is possible for members of cultures to reflexively and actively reorient and transform their own discourses. Thus, if our present and past discourses have been characterized by cultural prejudice, division, and domination, and the peoples from the non-Western, non-white, Third Worlds silenced, repressed, and alienated, then it should be a worthwhile goal for discourse professionals to help rediscover, reconstruct, foster, and promote new discourses of cultural diversity, tolerance, harmony, and prosperity.

All the contributors to this book proceed from this general starting point and set out to explore the particularities, complexities, intricacies, dynamic, and reflexivity of the cultural discourses they choose to study. Concerned with the inequality and hence struggle in cultural discourses, we are committed to a cultural politics that strives to change that power imbalance between East and West, North and South, and ultimately to facilitate global cultural solidarity and prosperity through a variety of discourse research strategies. Thus we set ourselves a set of particular research aims and actions: (1) undermining existing discourses of domination and exclusion, (2) helping reclaim identities and experiences of the already disadvantaged and marginalized, (3) identifying and advocating positive discourses of harmony, and (3) creating new discourses of cultural solidarity and prosperity.

Now, if there are culturally divergent concepts and views of language and communication, and if local and global perspectives can be usefully combined to reveal new things or to see the "same" thing in a new light, then discourse research should explore, recover, and reconstruct such cultural-intellectual heritages for possible bricolage and synergy. Further, if the hierarchy of human discourses is not natural but cultural, and if there exist also other, alternative discourses at the bottom or periphery, then discourse research must not take the discourses at the center or at the top as the sole object worth studying. Discourse research must treat seriously repressed and marginalized discourses in their own right and, in particular, make explicit, highlight, and undermine the cultural power relations and practices. In addition, it must help reclaim, valorize, and empower the repressed non-Western, Third/Fourth World discourses, in order to maintain and enhance cultural coexistence. In addition, if contemporary discourses are not autochthonous and monolithic but hybridized, diversified, and possessed of the critical consciousness to change, then discourse studies must help advocate new and culturally helpful discourses. Then, questions arise as what sorts of research strategies may be needed to those objectives, to which we must now turn.

Culturalist strategies in discourse research

In this section, I would like to suggest a set of research strategies or principles that may be instrumental to the study of discourse and cultural struggle. These pertain to the entire system of discourse research and of social science more broadly: epistemology, theory, method, data selection, question, analysis, and conclusion.

First, we should draw upon culturally different ways of knowing. This requires that we try to know about not just one cultural system of knowing but especially both Western and Eastern forms of knowing, since the Western tradition has been dominating. Or else at the very least, we should adopt the

attitude of respecting and acknowledging the possibility of culturally alternative ways of knowing. The Asian and Chinese perspective, for instance, emphasizes the indivisiveness of oneness of the cosmos and hence the holistic way of seeing things, different from the Western dualism (e.g., self and other, person and society, language and context, analyst and text). This alternative epistemology can be helpful for reconstructing a harmony-minded model of communication in the human cultural world and for making sense of the otherwise mechanically divided text and context, discourse and society, the person and culture, the researcher and the researched.

Second, we should ground our theory in particular cultural and historical context. Discourse, as dialectic wholes of texts and historical and cultural contexts, is time/space-bound and, as such, saturated with particular power relations. In the contemporary culture of globalization or more precisely global capitalism, discourse is also locally dynamic and diversified in connection with the global milieu. All this means that we should always stand on guard against universalizing tendencies but attempt to render possible dialogue between different cultural perspectives. Chinese communication is governed by the norm of harmonious relations; it bodies the Chinese synthetic way of thinking. A high-context language, Chinese is far more implicit and much less form-dependent than European languages. Moreover, Chinese discourse is embedded in the modern history of Western colonialism and imperialism. Consequently, understanding Chinese discourse solely on the Western dualistic, binary, and individualist model of discourse will obviously lead to distortion.

Thirdly, from the same argument of the historicity and cultural specificity of human discourses, it follows that we must not confine ourselves to pre-determined, perennial, or popular research agenda but should commit ourselves to cultural concerns of the moment, for example, the discourses of cultural domination or resistance of different populations and regions which we earlier identified the central and urgent time of our contemporary culture. Thus we can pay more attention to the cultural power inequality and struggle in human discourses and give voice to culturally marginalized discourses in and through our discourse research. Indeed, if Western and non-Western discourses are not a matter of center and periphery but different ways of constructing and acting upon the world — or different "language games" offering different worlds of experience — then Western discourse must not be taken as the sole object worth studying. Non-Western discourse, which has hitherto been marginalized and subordinated, must also be treated seriously. More importantly, if the relation between these language games — e.g. Eastern and Western discourses — is not symmetrical but saturated with power, then discourse research and the study of non-Western discourse in particular must help make explicit, highlight, and undermine the cultural power relations and practices; it must help reclaim, valorize, and empower the repressed non-Western discourse. In addition, if non-Western discourse is not autochthonous and monolithic, but hybridized,

diversified, and possessed of creative agency, then discourse studies must explore the complexity, new identities, and the possibility of cultural relation-building and transformation.

Fourthly, we must not rely on any predetermined, fixed and "universal" method (including techniques, procedures, and standards of assessment) but make eclectic, varied, and creative use of methods that are appropriate to the issues, objectives, and cultural and historical context at hand. Thus, mindful of the diversity of potentially useful methods from different cultural traditions, attentive to the local specifics and always conscious of the intended cultural-political objectives, we should try to make use of as many varied techniques as possible and practical. In particular, I should like to suggest that we adopt some particular strategic methods to deal with the data and questions mentioned in the preceding paragraph, such as the following. We can attempt to expose the marginality and marginalization of the discourses of certain cultural communities. We can try to rediscover those ways of speaking that enhance or foster cultural coexistence and progress. We can try to formulate or re-articulate new forms of speech that are conducive to the same cultural political purpose. We can also advocate the discussion and negotiation for culturally shared norms and procedures of communication (e.g., tolerance of and respect for difference), in order to ensure equality of intercultural communication.

Finally, since discourse is saturated with culture and cultural contestation in particular, we should refrain from reproducing dominant and repressive language as far as possible and try instead to use a culturally pluralistic, inclusive, critical, and egalitarian form of academic discourse. Specifically, we should reach our understandings in dialogue and consultation with the people whom we do research on, and we should keep our accounts and conclusions open to cultural dialogue, reinterpretation, and critique. In addition, we should formulate our research products in ways that will be acceptable to as many colleagues and students in the field as possible.

About this book

This book is composed of two parts. Part I discusses cultural and political issues involved in discourse theory and method, or the meta-discourse and its implications for transformation of discourse scholarship. Following the present chapter, in Chapter 2, Robert Maier considers the new cultural context of contemporary discourse (language and communication) and discusses new ways of engaging in cultural discourses. He observes that discourse is receiving increasing attention in the social sciences because it is a crucial medium and component in the various forms of power and identity in the contemporary multicultural world. After the phase of Western countries imposing universalistic norms and values on the rest of the world, we are now in a new era when the

right to be different is being affirmed by many cultural groups and communities in the world. Therefore, the author asks and tries to answer the question: How will it be possible to avoid a renewed imposition of some abstract universalistic norms and values while at the same time respecting cultural differences in a satisfactory way?

In Chapter 3, Aydan Gülerce argues that, as discourse analysis has been widely and rapidly spreading among many disciplines and international communities, it may be necessary to reflect on the deeper philosophical, theoretical, and practical issues involved. A major potential problem here, Gülerce suggests, might be the reproduction of many unchallenged presumptions and intellectual habits of the Western modernist paradigm. This may be even of relevance to those discourse analysts who are themselves aware of the hegemonic universalist tendencies and make conscious efforts towards multiculturalism. Accordingly, the author draws attention to and critically examines some of the interrelated issues and calls for a new, multidisciplinary, and multidiscursive understanding of human discourses, differences and solidarity.

Part II presents a diversity of empirical studies of intricate cultural power practices and processes of struggle, resistance, change, and cooperation in non-Western as well as Western discourses. The first four chapters deal with discourses in public life. In Chapter 4, Norman Fairclough looks at discourse in processes of social change in Central and Eastern Europe. Here, he applies the trans-disciplinary framework, incorporating Critical Discourse Analysis, to "transition" in Central and Eastern Europe and focuses on the particular case of the re-contextualization in Romania of the European Union's strategy to develop a "knowledge-based economy" and "information society." The analysis involves a Romanian government policy text, and the cultural implications from this exercise for meta-theory, theory, and method are discussed.

In Chapter 5, Feng Jieyun and Doreen Wu study the cultural values and change in mainland China on the basis of empirical research of Web advertisements. They examine the characteristics and the use of value appeals in the Web advertisements of mainland China and register how the cultural trends of mainland China are reflected in the Web advertisements. Via examination of 119 flash ads collected from the top nine websites of China in 2004, Feng and Wu show that the majority of Web ads in China are for IT-related products and services, and that utilitarian values rather than symbolic ones are in a predominant position. More significantly, they point out that the dominant value appeals in the Web ads are Western values rather than Eastern values, indicating a trend of progressive westernization in the young people in China.

In Chapter 6, Gary Sigley places the increasingly popular Christmas celebration in the broader context of China's unfolding social transformation in a way that highlights the interconnectivity of political, economic, and cultural discourses. Sigley treats the celebration of Christmas as a foreign festival here,

as an allegory for the celebration of China's integration with the global economy and of the emergence of a so-called "consumer democracy." On the other side, the author argues that this celebratory discourse of consumption is only one side of the Chinese Christmas story, the other side of the equation being related to those subjects who are not in a position to become "consumer-citizens." In conclusion, the author notes that any examination of the discourse of Christmas and cultural nationalism in China must take into account what is excluded just as much as what is included.

Qing Cao, in Chapter 7, examines Western representations of China with special reference to the mass media, and highlights the cultural power processes in the Western discourse of the Other. Combining an assessment of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks with an examination of the practice of reporting on China, Cao delineates broad patterns of Western images of China in the last two decades of the twentieth century and contextualizes them in the political and historical conditions. His chapter concludes that Sino-Western relations are a key factor in determining dominant discourses of China. Further, it suggests that the portrayal of China as a Western symbolic management of the "other" constitutes part of its sociopolitical processes in which its own values, assumptions, and cultural identities are confirmed and reproduced.

The next three chapters look at cultural power struggle at the theoretical, scholarly, or professional level. Jung-ran Park, in Chapter 8, examines the cultural issues and controversies involved in the theoretical frameworks of linguistic politeness. Utilizing naturally occurring contemporary Korean discourse, she critically examines the theoretical accounts of non-Western sociocultural phenomena and the concept of face, and argues how and why linguistic politeness can and should ultimately be seen as a sociocultural phenomenon, as indicated by its principal definitional characteristic as a so-called strategic device for reducing social friction by smoothing social interactions and for avoiding conflict during social encounters. As such, politeness is encoded within linguistic systems through the filtering of given social and cultural attributes. The cultural case of politeness, maintains Park, is merely a sign of all other sociocultural signs.

In Chapter 9, Garrett Albert Duncan offers a critical account of black language research discourse and cultural imperialism in the United States. The 1996 Oakland (California, USA) Unified School District resolution that affirmed the role of black culture and language in the education of Afro-American students touched off a brief but highly contentious international debate on school policy. This chapter critically examines the discourses that underlie research on black language in the United States that contribute to its contested meanings in the public sphere. The analysis here has implications not only for understanding conceptual, theoretical, and methodological issues related to black language but also for ethics and the pedagogical policies implied by different formulations, and the economic and social consequences that result from them.

In Chapter 10, Zongjie Wu and Qingxia Lü presents a critical analysis of the cultural struggle within traditional Chinese medical discourse. The authors engage texts collected from Chinese clinical practice, medicine research, media and related interviews, combined with ethnographic descriptions of a medical case, and reveal how the generic structure and the epistemological essence of the Chinese traditional practice are undermined by technologization of the language. Pressed for a persuasive discourse of justification and explanation, Chinese doctors strive for a scientification of their medicine tradition, but consequently, their language, which renders the form of life plausible for seeking a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, becomes gradually silenced and removed, posing a threat to the cultural integrity in general and the Chinese medicine heritage in particular.

The final two chapters move on to the question of conflict resolution and harmony between cultures in discourse and communication. In Chapter 11, Reza Najafbagy focuses on the Iranian perspective and argues that the establishment of realistic, proper, and effective communication based on mutual cultural understanding and goodwill would settle many national and international disputes. Najafbagy notes that the question becomes more acute, sensitive, and perhaps more complicated if a dispute arises among individuals or government representatives from the less and more developed nations. Further, he draws attention to the unprecedented economic, social, and political crises that cannot be resolved by traditional means. Therefore, the author goes on to developing new concepts of appropriate cross-cultural understanding and administrative systems, through the case of administrative reform in Iran, in ways that may lead to cultural reciprocity, transformation, and cooperation.

In Chapter 12, Shen Zhaohua interrogates the current educational discourse on intercultural communication and argues for a more culturally oriented approach. Taking issue with the Chinese case on communication with English-speaking Westerners, she argues that successful intercultural communication involves not only a person's linguistic competence but also his or her cultural competence. Here, she first shows why concentration on learning the linguistic structure without attention to history, culture, and hence power is one of the central problems with teaching English in the Chinese tertiary setting. Then, the author attempts to answer the question of how teaching and training in tertiary education can be transformed and mobilized to enhance students' overall intercultural communication competence.

Let me end this introduction with an announcement. In conjunction with this book are a number of associated global academic endeavors: *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* (edited by Shi-xu), a tri-annual International Conference on Multicultural Discourses (*www.shixu.com/institute-conference*), and the International Association for Multicultural Discourses (*www.shixu.com/institute-association*). Herewith we invite scholars and students the world over to join in our efforts in turning social science in general and discourse studies in particular into multiculturalist scholarship.

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