


Discourse, Authority and Manipulation in Multimodal Perspective (DAMMP 2023)

Conference

16th-17th March 2023

University of Lorraine (Nancy, France)

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Discourse emanates from various sources, some of which may be considered to be more authoritative than others. The knowledge available from these sources is “taught and learned”, “produced and used”, “sold and consumed” (Van Dijk 2011: 33). This raises the central epistemological question of the sources of knowledge, and for what purpose knowledge is disseminated. In other words, “who produces what knowledge for whom?” (*Ibid.*). Knowledge production is based on a “sociology of knowledge”, which means not only knowing what knowledge social groups already possess, but also what knowledge these groups may require in order to communicate in a satisfactory manner in society (*Ibid.*). Sources which command authority include ‘official’ genres (such as news reports, scientific publications and legal documents) are considered legitimate due to the social acceptability of certain ‘official’ sources which set “knowledge standards” (*Ibid.*). These standards give rise to the theory of “epistemic vigilance”, in which “interaction among epistemically vigilant agents is likely to generate not only psychological but also social vigilance mechanisms” (Sperber *et al.* 2010: 361). Crucially, a reliable informant “must possess genuine information” and must be willing to share it with their audience (*Ibid.*: 369). To what extent do the information sources which constitute a “sociology of knowledge” reveal a correlation between authority in discourse and access to knowledge? How should any discrepancy in the knowledge standards between source and content be interpreted?

The link between the concept of manipulation and Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) is well-established (Van Dijk 2006). Manipulation in discourse takes place primarily “by text and talk” and “is a form of talk-in-interaction” linked to power and abuses of power (*Ibid.*: 360). As manipulation occurs within the mind, the cognitive processes that govern it lend themselves to a cognitive approach (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, as certain discursive genres may produce different corresponding mental genres (Van Dijk 2014: 225), cognitive linguistics is particularly adapted to analysing different genres involving manipulation. However, certain genres pose increasing challenges for CDS. Firstly, in political discourse, the epistemic vigilance of an audience may lead politicians to “provide guarantees for the truths of their sayings” (Chilton 2004: 23). Growing political scepticism, coupled with the public’s need for “a simple and understandable world in times of uncertainty and insecurity”, has resulted in people looking to the fictionalisation of politics in the media (Wodak 2011: 206). This blurring of the division between fact and fiction is salient in ‘fake news’ stories, where “the facts are preceded by their denunciation” (Andrejevic 2020: 19). Secondly, technological advances in the twenty-first century have facilitated the development and proliferation of new forms of media, including the rise of social media platforms for news-sharing and forums for expressing opinions. These forms of “ephemeral media” (Grainge 2011) have changed the rapidity with which information can be transmitted, while video-sharing platforms can result in traditional segments of discourse becoming fragmented into smaller parts for easier digestion.

Consequently, there has been a recent turn towards multimodality in CDS, with increasing amounts of information processed through the “visual channel” in the news and other forms of communication (Hart 2016: 336). A major contribution to the multimodal approach is Systemic

Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) (O'Halloran and Lim 2014; O'Halloran *et al.* 2019). Inspired by Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014), SF-MDA uses multimodal analytic methods involving “mathematical techniques and scientific visualizations” (O'Halloran and Lim 2014: 148). Multimodal approaches have “a view of meaning as being greater than the sum of its parts”, in which “meaning in any communicative act is not just a product of the individual modes that contribute to it but of the interplay between them” (Hart and Marmol Queralto 2021: 530-531).

The discursive picture can be enhanced by gesture analysis, which provides for a coordinated message with speech (Kendon 2004; Streeck 2009). Specifically, the “impulse to gesture” occurs “at the interface between a cognitive-linguistic system and a face-to-face communication context, with the important qualifications that cognition is embodied and language is multimodal; face-to-face communication is interactive and situated” (Harrison 2018: 214). To this extent, gestures cannot be reduced to the mere externalisation of “pre-existing mental representations by means of body movements” (Kita and Alibali 2017: 262). Gesture, like multimodality in general, may demonstrate semiotic convergence with language, and may corroborate the reliability of informants, but does such convergence exist in manipulative contexts?

Although manipulation may involve an epistemic shift away from fact towards fiction or a different type of reality, how should manipulation be analysed in genres of fiction which contain elements of fact or reality? Do we observe the same linguistic and multimodal processes? The concept merits further exploration (Sorlin 2016, 2017), as fictional discourse “mirrors the ordinary functioning of language used to mediate social interactions in everyday life” (Sorlin 2017: 143). It may also expose the mechanisms of political and economic power in the modern media (Del Valle Rojas 2020), while genres like infotainment may blur the line between fact and fiction in audience reception (Ferré 2016).

The conference is open to papers which adopt a linguistic approach to manipulative discourse through multimodal analysis, focusing on English. Themes may include SF-MDA approaches, social semiotics or other multimodal approaches, focusing on official or unofficial sources, specialised areas of discourse (including, for example, political discourse, media discourse or scientific discourse), or the use of manipulation in genres of fiction. Other themes will be considered on merit.

References

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Keynote speakers

Gaëlle Ferré, Professor of Linguistics, University of Poitiers

Simon Harrison, Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, City University of Hong Kong

Christopher Hart, Professor of Linguistics, Lancaster University

Call for papers

We invite participants to submit an abstract (in English or French) not exceeding 500 words, plus 5 or 6 keywords. Papers may be given in English or French and will be allocated 20 minutes, with follow-up questions during the session. Abstract submissions must include two separate Word formats: one anonymised, the other containing the name(s), affiliation(s) and email address(es) of the author(s) in addition to the title of the paper. All abstracts will be sent for anonymous peer review by the Scientific Committee. The Organiser and Scientific Committee reserve the right to request modifications to the abstract as a condition of acceptance. Parallel sessions may be used where appropriate. Some papers will be published.

The deadline for submissions is **Monday 19th September 2022**. Decisions will be communicated by e-mail by Monday 31st October 2022. Please send all submissions with the subject “DAMMP 2023” to Robert Butler: robert.butler@univ-lorraine.fr

Scientific Committee

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Registration

While it is anticipated that participants will be able to attend the conference in person, a hybrid format will also enable to participants to follow the conference online. The University of Lorraine asks for a registration fee of not less than 50 euros, whatever the format of the conference. A website specifically for the conference will be available shortly.

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