

Media Discourses

COMM2112 Theories of
Communication and Persuasion
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Paul Emerson Teusner

What is discourse?

- Type of speech
- System of relationship conventions
- Socially constructed knowledges contained in regulated systems of statements, conventions or language use

“To begin with, I could argue that I am insisting that the historical materialist reading of ideologies starts with social relations and determines the ideologies which they necessitate in their practical operation. It does not start with discourses and induce from them their generative social relations.”

Colin Sumner, *Reading Ideologies: An investigation into the Marxist Theory of Ideology and the Law*

“He’s a bachelor. He has a dog. Sam the Blue Heeler. He basically works seven days a week and, despite his work and workload, his white-on-white Hawthorn townhouse is a dream scene of cleanliness and order. It is bright, new, open, airy, modern and north facing, which means the merest hint of lint is going to show in the glare bouncing off the pale, stone-paved courtyard and in through the glass walls of french doors.”

Domain Magazine, The Age, 31st March, 2004.

“The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It is a symbol of our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God’s kingdom.”

– Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Faith #19

Discourse theory

- Concerned with how language shapes our world
- Asks:
 - What is the relationship between language and social relations?
 - How do media texts contribute to the maintenance or shaping of relationships of power and structure in society?

Michel Foucault

- 1926-1984
- Social historian, sociologist, philosopher
- Definitions and distinctions of power
 - Power as capacity
 - Power as force
 - Power as authority
 - Social relations of power
 - Power as action on action

Power vs governmentality

- To govern is to structure the possible field of action of others
- Relies on premise that all individuals have power

Foucault's interests

- Rise of republic, democracy and individualism
- Rise of psychology and similar academic disciplines
- Relation between power, subjectivity and “truth”

Discourses

- They reflect particular values and identities
- They highlight the power of dominant groups to insist on some meanings and exclude others, sometimes through single words or images.
- Key words link us into the meanings of the wider discourse
- Foucault argues that discourses actually create “regimes of truth” and therefore shape our perceptions.

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Subscribe to our values or don't come here

By Peter Costello
February 24, 2006

Australia is not an emigrant nation. Australia is an immigrant nation. This is a defining characteristic of who we are. Outside indigenous people, we are all immigrants or descendants of immigrants.

People come to Australia and become Australian citizens because they want to embrace the things this country stands for. We should be proud that people from all over the world come here looking for Australian values - our values - and want to embrace them. Values like economic opportunity, security, democracy, personal freedom, the physical environment and strong physical and social infrastructure.

Unless we have a consensus of support about how we will form our legislatures and an agreement to abide by the laws, none of us will be able to enjoy our rights and liberties without being threatened by others.

We have a compact to live under a democratic legislature and obey the laws it makes. Those who are outside this compact threaten the rights and liberties of others. They should be refused citizenship if they apply for it. Where they have it, they should be stripped of it if they are dual citizens and have some other country that recognises them as citizens.

Terrorists and those who support them do not acknowledge the rights and liberties of others - the right to live without being maimed, the right to live without being bombed - and as such they

Some common discourses

- Discourses of wealth and poverty
- Discourses of national destiny and identity
- Discourses of gender and sexuality
- Discourses of terrorism
- Discourses of the market

Norman Fairclough

- UK, still living and still involved
- *Language in the New Capitalism*
- Interest in the relationship between social structures, practices and discourse

Social
structures



Discourse



Ideology

Examples

Discourse

- Family
- Worker
- Public
- Consumer

ideology

- Values, morals, education
- Rights, ownership, status
- Service, greater good
- Choice, lifestyle, freedom

Benefits

- Highlights the force of words and texts in how we identify ourselves and our place in the world
- Discerns how new language can lead to new forms of power
- Understands power as not something imposed on us, but something we all participate in

Criticisms

- Too bound by its desire to call things “subjective”
- Too bound in words – discourses can be identified in other forms of communication

Kress and Van Leeuwen

