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BAAL/CUP Seminars 2013

Text Trajectories – Developing dynamic approaches to textual analysis

This seminar took place on 19 April, 2013 at the Centre for Language and Communication, Faculty of Language and Education Studies, The Open University. The seminar was coordinated by Janet Maybin and Theresa Lillis and there were 28 participants, including four postgraduate students, from universities in Britain, Belgium and South Africa.

Introduction

The overall aims of the seminar were to explore how researchers are currently adopting dynamic approaches to text analysis across local and global contexts and to open up critical debate about the empirical and theoretical value of 'text trajectories' and other notions deriving from the propensity of texts to be transferred, transposed and transformed across different contexts, with different resulting meanings, significance and effects.

Objectives

- Bring together researchers from sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, literacy studies and linguistic ethnography who have been researching text production and uptake practices in a variety of different institutional contexts
- Explore empirical and theoretical tools for developing dynamic approaches to text analysis
- Explore and discuss the analytic affordances of 'text trajectories' and related notions – TEXT HISTORIES, GENRE CHAINS, GENRE SUITES, TEXT CHAINS – for researching linguistic phenomena
- Determine ways in which research on text trajectories can contribute to, or have an impact on, institutional practices and policies.

Five speakers presented research undertaken in a range of different institutional settings: law and policing, medical surgery, academia and social work, journalism, workplace health and safety practices, and a self-build project. There was an emphasis across the papers not only on how we can research and theorise dynamic aspects of text production and uptake, but also on how this research can impact on policy and practice. While the speakers were employing

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a range of approaches in their research, they all shared a commitment to ethnographically informed close analysis and an interest in how such analysis could feed into issues of specific instititional and broader social concern. Each presentation was followed by discussion and additional small group discussions identified emerging points and questions. The seminar concluded with a respondent-led plenary.

Papers and discussion

Frances Rock (Cardiff University) focused on how textual travel in legal settings has the potential to influence lives in permanent and incisive ways. Using examples of data from her onging research in policing, she focused in detail on trajectories which are intrinsic to processes of cautioning, interviewing, police training, custody, and letters and calls to the police (Rock 2007). In each case she considered the processes and effects of recontextualisation and entextualisation, for instance, in text mediation such as when police explain the meaning of the caution to suspects. She raised points about the processes of personalisation in cautioning, the chaining of texts in interviewing trajectories as police attempt to construct timelines for critical events, the use of hyperlegislative language to establish power and authority, and how text trajectories can contain traces of defunct practices which have to be somehow managed in police/suspect interactions. Citing intertextuality in relation to different levels of language (e.g. sentences, stories), Rock drew her presentation together with a quotation from Smith (2006: 66) 'The magical character of replicable texts . . . is that they are read, seen, heard, watched and so on in particular local and observable settings while at the same time hooking up an individual's consciousness into relations that are translocal.'

Theresa Lillis (The Open University) explored text histories and trajectories in two distinct contexts: academia (writing for publication) and social work (case note recording). She highlighted the value of adopting a text history approach for shifting analytic attention away from single texts towards clusters of texts across time and space and for identifying key moments of production and uptake. Stressing the limits of situated local analysis of literacy events (Brandt & Clinton 2002), Lillis considered how texts travel, which parts remained fixed and which changed, in the context of academics pursuing publication in Anglophone journals in a global context (Lillis & Curry 2010). She pointed out the important role of brokers and the epistemological implications of textual changes in the academic articles. In relation to data from case notes by social workers, Lillis illustrated the ways in which institutionally designed software systems prescribed specific text trajectories and emphasised the important influence of real and imagined future text trajectories on the ways in which texts such as case notes are produced and taken up. A key issue raised was that of professional voice, control and accountability on decisions about what and how to write. Professionalism here involved looking beyond the local and navigating enormous and sometimes irreconcilable tensions.

Jeff Bezemer (Institute of Education, London) presented a multimodal approach to researching text trajectories, where the analytic focus is on representation, mode, affordance, transformation and transduction, and the gains and losses of particular transformations across modes. Bezemer drew from his research on the negotiation of meaning-making in the

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operating theatre (Bezemer et al. 2011). Concentrating on surgery training, he examined how nature is turned into culture in charting biomedical categories and how the human body becomes a text which is read through a particular epistemological lens (for example Western scientific versus alternative medical models). He highlighted the interpretative skills that trainee surgeons need to develop in shifting between the two-dimensional diagrams and images in text books, and the three-dimensional nature of actual activity in operating theatres, which is further complicated by digital equipment enabling imaging of internal procedures. Bezemer raised questions about how learning occurs across formal training, simulation and practical craft, and how such complex multimodal processes can be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. He demonstrated how he digitally records what people say in relation to what they do with surgical instruments, facilitating the mapping and analysis of transmodal meaning-making trajectories which are integral to teaching and learning in this context.

Tom Van Hout (Leiden University) examined how text trajectories coordinate workplace institutional activity in news production, in the process changing interpretations and outcomes. He argued that these trajectories are an important focus for research: while textualism dominates current language ideology (Blommaert 2004) and labour is increasingly textualised, workplace writing has been understudied as an expert activity. Drawing from his research on journalists' working practices (Van Hout & Macgilchrist 2010), Van Hout reflected on the use of ethnographic methods to follow news stories across episodes of recontextualisation (drafting, editing, newsroom conferences) in order to investigate how texts are institutionally funneled to materialise as 'news'. He highlighted the tension between pursuing a narrow and deep focus on key informants, interactive observations and computer-assisted micro-level analysis, and the need for repeated observations to establish the historical depth which is practically impossible to attain in real-time and virtual ethnography, where traditional ethnographic concepts of 'place' and 'being there' are complicated by 'media-centric issues of flow and fluidity of information within a networked society' (Murphy 2011: 396). Van Hout highlighted how being a good journalist is predicated on the ways in which texts are processed and transformed across different institutional contexts in the 'fixing' of news.

Catherine Kell (University of the Western Cape) proposed a theoretical shift within Literacy Studies away from the framework of events, practices and domains and towards the role of texts in meaning-making across space and time. In this context, she suggested that the focus should be on text trajectories, rather than literacy practices as the main unit of analysis, and that shifts in scale were of particular interest in theorising relations of text production and interpretation across different contexts. After reviewing how 'scale' has been conceptualised in sociolinguistics (e.g. Blommaert 2007; Collins, Baynham & Slembrouck 2009) and human geography (e.g. Massey 2004; Marston, Jones & Woodward 2005), she presented a methodology for tracing text trajectories at the local level within participation frameworks in event-spaces. This incorporated distinctions of scale in theorising the relation between the local and the global, and addressed the role of texts in constructing social processes which have greater durability and irreversibility, or not. She presented contrasting examples of the highly 'scripted' trajectory of a health and safety incident report form in a New Zealand construction company and the 'emergent' trajectory of a woman's complaint about her house in a South African self-build project, to highlight the importance of

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fine-grained analysis of space and time differentiations, and of how these throw into perspective issues of power across trajectories (Kell 2014).

Conclusion

A wide range of interesting questions and issues emerged in papers and discussions throughout the day. These were summed up by Karin Tusting, in her role as respondent, as follows:

- What are the functions of text trajectories in particular contexts? What is the nature of the work involved? What is being fixed, what travels, and why?
- What are the different affordances of different types of texts? For instance, what are the effects of mode (e.g. 2D vs 3D), different technologies including software design, numerical representation?
- Who gets to move texts and who gets to fix them? Who has the discretion to produce texts and to change them? Who decides on the material means of production, and on where the texts go next? Who even knows where the texts go – and who doesn't? Who are the brokers; what are the networks; what is the participant framework in the event space?
- How do people learn to move texts, and what disrupts this? How do people learn what travels well – what 'counts' in different settings and what doesn't – and why? How does expertise develop in different contexts?
- What are our fixed points in these trajectories, and how do we fix them as researchers? What do we call the trajectories, and how do we break them down?

We plan to pursue these questions and publish further.

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Conceptualizing multilingualism under globalization: Membership claims, social categories and emblems of authenticity

The seminar took place on 11 and 12 June 2013 at the MOSAIC Centre for Research on Multilingualism, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham.

Introduction

The University of Birmingham's MOSIAC Centre for Research on Multilingualism and the Institute for Research on Superdiversity (IRiS) hosted a two-day seminar at the School of Education, University of Birmingham. The seminar was organized in collaboration with the Linguistic Ethnography Forum.

In complex societies people belong to, or are ascribed membership of, multiple social categories. The papers presented in this colloquium ask questions about the value and force of social categories. They consider how and why people claim or reject membership of those categories, and how trajectories of belonging change across time and space. They interrogate the stability of membership of social categories, and of the categories themselves.

Furthermore, the papers engage with the implications of these questions for social policy. In this seminar the presentations consider how membership of social categories is negotiated in the delicate weave of social interaction. The papers argue that analysts may gain purchase

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