

Book Review

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Projecting the Future through Political Discourse: the case of the Bush doctrine. Patricia L. Dunmire. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamin Publishing Co., 2011, 218 pages. (Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture, ISSN1569-9463; V.41). ISBN 9789027206329

Overview

Dunmire's seminal work, *Projecting the Future through Political Discourse*, is in contrast to many other discourse studies, which have largely focused on memory and history. The work, which emulates from and encompasses several previous publications, not only highlights and discusses futurology, the discursive construction of the future through text and talk, but is a valuable resource for those who study political discourse. Dunmire's work, with the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and systemic-functional linguistic (SFL) opens the way to recognise, comprehend and greatly understand government politicking. Where governments aim to fashion and generate futures in the public arena and ensure the desires and agendas of that government are achieved. These desires and agendas being driven by fear; fear of the unknown and of power. Put simply, Dunmire demonstrates 'how representations of the future that serve particular social and political interest are naturalised, rendered as depictions of an unavoidable, inevitable reality that is outside human design and influence and declares how things must be forever' (Dunmire, 2011, p. 19).

Dunmire initially highlights how the post-Cold war doctrine, the discourses of the new world order, fashioned from the grand old party (GOP) initially produced and structured a particular order of reality. This doctrine therefore sets the stage for the policy responses of the George W. Bush's administration to the September 11, 2001 terrorism. This violent assault then becomes the vehicle which the discursive construction of the future is outlined and promoted, over the subsequent month's post 9/11. This was achieved through the George W. Bush's administration's discourse of stamping out a future reality of catastrophe and chaos, where weapons of mass destruction existed. This discourse shaped and defined a future reality, which gave credibility and authority of engaging the enemy in a 'pre-emptive' war with Iraq. At the time the discourse also encompassed a future where not only Iraq's people were 'liberated', but also it preserved the 'Pax Americana'.

Within the book, SFL theory and methods are used to analyse text, it is complemented by the use of CDA to analyse discourse, society and hegemony. SFL and CDA are both used concurrently to understand language as social contract, that language and context adopt and reproduce each other and are used as a means to identify the cultural and historical context of meaning. Dunmire uses the best aspects of both CDA and SFL to analyse and present the dominant images of the future. These dominant images are used in society 'to starve off visions and conceptions of the future that inevitably arise at moments of significant social, political and cultural change' (Dunmire, 2011, p. 19).

Chapter synopsis

The book's introductory and review chapters, not only introduces the subject at hand, but also provides a clear and concise contextual understanding of the subject matter. Dunmire reviews the modern conception of the future and illuminates how this is impacted socially and politically. In addition, she also discusses and incorporates how the future is characterised and projected by the media and policy discourse. The two chapters following the introduction and review are dedicated to the analysis of the data. It looks at the linguistic constructions of a future reality and the normalisation of such a construction to ensure it is observed as reality. Lastly, it looks at how though speech and verbal talk, this construction has been packaged for the media and the public to consume so as to provide a 'particular visions of the future and how these visions function to legitimate the Iraq war and the policy of pre-emptive war' (Dunmire, 2011, p. 25).

The remaining chapters are focused on the analysis of the discursive history, relations and transformations of the Bush Doctrine, by using a syntagmatic and paradigmatic viewpoint. Initially, the analysis commences with an analysis of discourse within post-Cold War documents, which in due course has steered the 21st century pre-emptive war discourse and ultimately the war with Iraq. The later sections examine diachronically, the change of language within Bush Doctrine to demonstrate the paradigmatic word substitution embedded within the text which occurred over the text's history and political context.

In addition, a chapter is devoted to the examination of the Clinton administration's security documents. This discussion outlines the delineation between political parties and presidential administrations as to what representations of the future were sustained or ceased. The examination also includes an examination of the dichotomy that exists between what is viewed as national security among the various political parties when in power. Lastly, Dunmire, spends the last chapter discussing the need to pay greater attention to other discourses, such as those which have opposing representations of the future, which will 'help claim the agency and potentiality that the future offers for social transformation' (Dunmire, 2011, p. 26).

Discussion

There is some reservation of the book, as conceivably for the average American and particularly the republican voter, the book would be, regardless of the discourse, viewed as irrelevant, disrespectful and near treason against America's rights to and the culture of freedom which it sanctions. Therefore, plausibly, the actual message of the book would be misplaced among those who feel the future reality of 'war on terror' and 'pre-emptive' war with Iraq was inevitable and not merely a construction of historical and present political policy and agenda. However for the more astute, the book offers its readers an insightful and powerful example of how the future can and is constructed and given life through political discourse.

Additionally, a clear reflexive preface to the work would be useful. This may enlighten each reader as to the motivations, political views and preconceptions of the writer. This may alleviate the concern of any bias within the analysis undertaken of the discourse and text. As Blommaert & Bulcaen (2000) have highlighted a similar debate regarding those who used CDA. That there is a preponderance to analyse discourse with a view which is biased by one's own political views and prejudices of the discourse (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Schegloff, 1997). However, Van Dijk (2001) argues critical discourse analyst's assume an unambiguous position as their aim is to 'understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality' (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 352). Therefore a much clearer statement of this fact would only enrich the seminal work further.

Overall the book has been a complex, multifaceted and yet an insightful thought provoking work to engage with. It is highly recommended for those who study focus is within futurology, political discourse and the use of critical discourse analysis and systemic-functional linguistic within their own work. Dunmire's work will remain a text and a reference for many a future study and scholarship.

References

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