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Book review

**Review of Rodney Jones (ed.). 2021.
Viral Discourse Cambridge Elements in Applied Linguistics
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Рецензия

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Viral Discourse, edited by Rodney H. Jones, consists of 10 articles that address a vital and core aspect of the literature on discourse analysis, with special emphasis on ‘emotional discourse’. This trendy title of *Viral Discourse* depicts the COVID-19 implications and ramifications in a multimodal fashion of pain, agony, suffering, and suspense. It also alludes to conspiracy and skepticism, the ‘Us vs. Them’ debate, to affect all aspects of life, including health, economy, social life,

psychological and mental health, education, transportation, media, and the news. This wide array of diversity brought a myriad of discourse analysis approaches to the scene, including critical discourse analysis, genre analysis, corpus-assisted discourse analysis, and mediated discourse analysis, to respond to real-world problems and perhaps to provide solutions.

In Chapter one, Jones sets the stage for the major theme dominating this work, namely ‘emotional discourse’ in the time of the COVID-19 crisis. With all the eloquence and power of rhetoric Jones has as a discourse analyst, in this very situation, he was helpless, failing to find the words talking to his COVID-19-stricken dying father, only to say from a 4,000-mile distance and over the phone ‘I love you’, ‘I forgive you’, and ‘Forgive me’. It is this very theme of emotional discourse that prevails in this volume, especially in Chapters six, seven, and eight. Jones came to believe that while discourse analysts do not count as ‘essential workers’ or among those who save lives, they still can, through words, help us to live with pain and alleviate the suffering of those who experience the loss of loved ones. But while Jones believes that discourse analysts cannot save lives, they might help people be aware of some actions which are likely to minimize the effects of COVID-19, and how to be essential to people around you by creating meaningful, self and other boosting Discourse.

In Chapter two, by invoking the ‘social semiotics’ paradigm, Rodney Jones points out that the heat of the pandemic did not subside but has only taken a different path, simulating the clash of cultures, Eastern and Western on wearing face-masks. In some cultures, particularly some western countries, surgical mask-wearing in public is associated with racist reactions and even mask-phobia (Weale 2020). Similar negative remarks of abuse were leveled against westerners living in some Asian countries, reproducing, to some extent, the ‘Us vs. Them’ debate. Some discourse analysts tend to interpret this difference as an approach of social semiotics explaining the social meaning of a sign according to context (see Ho & Li, 2019). In some cultures, masks are meant to ‘conceal’, and in some others, especially in the COVID-19 context, they are there to ‘protect’ self and others. Such differences about masking, according to Klein (2020), “reveal troubling cracks in our healthcare, our tolerance, and in our ability to negotiate common meanings” (p. 13).

In Chapter three, Christoph Hafner approaches the COVID-19 crisis from a genre analytical perspective. The Discourse of expert scientists was the main source of information to the public through mainstream media outlets. A case in point is the controversy over face-masking. As communicative events, genres are meant to inform and educate through scientific evidence and reasoning provided by experts who use discursive forms of thinking (Hafner 2013). Questions such as ‘can face masks protect from coronavirus?’ and ‘can face masks slow the virus spread?’ were featured in the views of professional experts (Renwick 2020, Heymann 2020). A limitation of the current article is the small set of data used, where a larger data set, as stated by the author, would have given a more predictive power of the analysis as different standards of evidence may be used by different experts.

In Chapter four, Wing Yee Jenifer Ho brings to light the controversial issue of face masks and cultural identity on YouTube. Ho reports that the debate about the effectiveness of face masks in curbing the coronavirus is far from over where ‘cultural positioning’ comes into play in YouTube videos. By utilizing a social semiotic approach of Discourse, Ho explains that communication is multimodal in nature; it rests on a social semiotic approach that is not nurtured only by language but is a blend of images, sound, color, and gesture. The multimodal construction of cultural positioning featuring the American ‘Teacher Mike’ in Ho’s YouTube experiment about face-masking and social distancing in a Chinese supermarket is conducted through a combination of modes including speech, writing, audio-visuals, and camera. The experiment shows how multilingual and multimodal semiotic systems work together to educate people about how to conduct themselves to reduce the dangers of the pandemic by adhering to the face-masking culture (Zhu Hua et al. 2017). While acknowledging the value of this study, it would have been more advantageous if the author had added a comparative dimension. This enables him to investigate the results of cultural positioning with regard to face-masking in a western locality, with less favorable attitudes to face masking than what has been experienced in the Chinese supermarket example.

In Chapter five, Sylvia Jaworska sheds light on the importance of a Comparative Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis approach in understanding the COVID-19 pandemic based on media representation. Jaworska’s investigation of the media representation of the coronavirus in the UK, USA, and Germany contributes to people’s understanding of how the virus crisis is viewed elsewhere. The article studies lexical choices, collocations, word formation processes, and lemmatization to understand meaning. The results showed that collocations were very helpful in uncovering the most salient ways of representing the virus. Metaphors were also dominant in the UK and USA context. While acknowledging the importance of the comparative method in the data analysis and in interpreting the results obtained, it should be pointed out, as reported by the author, that by focusing only on collocations, “this study is small in scope and does not utilize the full potential of corpus-based methods to study discourse” (Partington et al. 2013).

In Chapter six, Zhu Hua explores the meaning of ‘sense and sensibility’ through investigating the linguistic landscape in a London street during the COVID-19 lockdown period. This concept was reflected in the responses of the shops to the pandemic, and the words, terms, metaphors, and images carried similar representations of the linguistic landscape. It is a personalization of the images to express attitudes, feelings, motives, and emotion to the place and surroundings in order to understand language in its different forms and multiple meanings. The ethnographic diversity during the COVID-19 crisis was reflected in the data collection process and how the linguistics landscape has changed during the Pandemic (Kuiper 2020). The multicultural and linguistic interaction was also reflected in the mix between the different communities, creeds, and religions, where ethnic shops with signs in different languages have added to the emotional

dimension of Discourse. The 200 handwritten signs targeted in this study, and which appeared in public places, reflect the informality and spontaneity of those signs, and at the same time people's spirit of unity, cooperation, and concern for the safety and well-being of self and others. Interestingly, signs, even in bilingual communities, were mostly written in English, and only a few of them were bilingual. The idea is for the directives, instructions, and notices to reach the general public and not only to be directed to a particular group.

In Chapter seven, Irhan Aslan sheds light on the spread of Internet memes expressing users' creativity and humor in describing aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic such as face masks, sanitizers, home quarantine, and social distancing. In this context, the author presents humor in a three-element mold including, intertextuality, wordplay, and incongruity. Creating Internet memes of humor and creativity can help people engage in social and political events brought by the pandemic. The textual and visual components of the meme combine to provide an interpretation of the intended meaning, which is often changed due to applying word-formation processes of blending, compounding, clipping, acronyms, folk etymology, among others (see Al-Salman & Haider 2021, see Ponton 2021, this issue and Way 2021. this issue). The textual and visual images create some kind of humor that helps people cope with the impact of the virus, reduce stress, boost their psychological state and mental health. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, Internet memes have gained great popularity and reached out to a large audience of different cultures, values and ideologies which fuel and intensify the emotionalism of media discourse.

In Chapter eight, Carmen Lee tackles the question of the COVID-19 'Hate' speech from a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective and how it is interpreted discursively (Wodak 2015). Hate speech which is associated with discriminatory practices and attitudes based on race, ethnicity, religion, and gender, often leads to conflict and violence. In the context of COVID-19, the author explains that associating the name of the virus with a certain country (e.g., Chinese Virus) is considered 'hate' speech as WHO is the authority of naming viruses and diseases. On the other hand, supporters of the use of Chinese Virus legitimize their use through some discourse legitimization strategies where the meaning of hate speech may be discursively interpreted; it is not a crime but an expression of emotions, including anger. However, from a critical discourse analysis perspective, a discursive action must be interpreted within its larger discursive social, political, and discursive social, political, and historical contexts. Therefore, it is important that discourse analysts uncover the discourse strategies which construct hate speech so that people refrain from using online hateful expressions of abuse which go viral.

In Chapter nine, Rodney Jones comes back to call for 'Order out of Chaos: Coronavirus Communication and the Construction of Competence'. In the process of organizing the captions of the COVID-19 governmental signs and slogans in the UK, Jones used the mediated discourse analysis (MDA) approach which focuses on actions (i.e., what people need to do with it). A case in point is the UK's

three-caption podium signs of: ‘STAY HOME’, PROTECT NHS’, and ‘SAVE LIVES’ which were heavily criticized by social media due to pun of words and the unclarity of the proper action for the general public to take. The same applies to the government’s new slogan for the color-coded ‘COVID-19 Alert System’ – based on terrorist alert – with five-threat levels ranging from yellow to red, an analogy which does not work with infectious diseases as it has limited impact on public behavior. However, Jones says that while the COVID-19 alert system proved to be of little use to the general public, it was a good performative tool for the government.

In Chapter ten, Elisabetta Adami explains how discourse analysts and social semioticians can guide people to act in the times of global emergency like the COVID-19 crisis. Consequently, Adami proposes a four-element formula for changing the semiotic regime: 1) keeping people physically apart, 2) having people connected through online communication, 3) responding to abrupt changes, and 4) re-disciplining process of self and behaviour. In order to make sense and act properly, Adami calls for collective action through establishing communication networks and contacts with people across the world to set up *Pandemic Meaning Making of Interaction and Communication (PanMeMic)* Facebook groups. This system allows people to share ideas and points of view which allow for wider perspectives and insights for better practices (see Goddard & Wierzbicka 2021).

To conclude, the wealth of this volume resides in presenting a well-scaffolded collection of articles representing different discourse analysis approaches with special focus on “Emotionalisation of Media Discourse”. This element has most successfully showed how discourse analysts pool their efforts by using all available discourse tools to address issues of direct bearing on people’s lives, health, and well-being. By so doing, discourse analysis can make a difference through educating the general public about how to face and guard against the killer virus by watching, recognizing, and noticing so that they have a better understanding of how the virus is evolving. Through their varied approaches (CDA, MDA, corpus-assisted Discourse, multimodal digital Discourse), discourse analysts can contribute to forming real-world solution to emerging problems, not only COVID-19 specific issues, but also global issues of inequality, racism, discrimination, power, cultural identity, and the like. After all, it is this thread of humanitarian values and principles of sharing and caring, emotional touch and reaching out that discourse analysts can help strengthen for the service humanity at large irrespective of spatial and temporal constraints.

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