УДК 81`42(048)
DOI 10.20339/PhS.1-22.112

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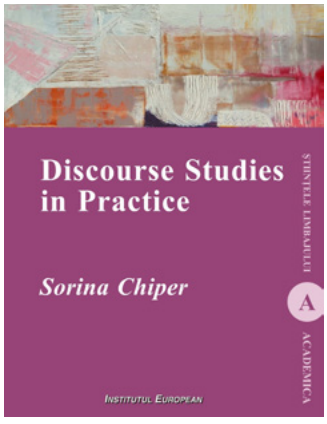
Review of S. Chiper's book "Discourse studies in practice"



Sorina Chiper is a lecturer at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi, Romania where she teaches courses in Business Communication and Intercultural Communication. Her PhD thesis was awarded the title of Best Dissertation in the field of American Studies. She was a member of two national research projects focused on the language of participatory democracy and on corporate social responsibility. She has presented the results of her research at more than 50 conferences. Her fields of expertise are: translation studies, intercultural communication, 20th century American autobiography, sociolinguistics, professional communication in English, and academic writing.

The book under review is actually a collection of S. Chiper's papers published starting from 2006, going through 2011, 2012, 2014 up to 2018 and 2019 all about a relatively innovative method, namely, that of discourse analysis. In one of my recent reviews, I mention the latter to be a challenging endeavor, given that discourse itself — ever since the origin of the notion in the second half of the twentieth century — shuns both a universal approach and definition [1. P. 780].

Out of quite a few perspectives, the author has chosen one of the latest developments, that is, Critical Discourse Analysis, which aims to explore the relations of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; as well as to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power [Fairclough as referred to in Chiper. P. 16].

The volume contains a wealth of discursive linguistic material from areas such as politics, economy, ideology and translation as institutional branding. The latter topic looks one of the most attractive, since S. Chiper touches upon a problem of translator's invisibility, which may make him/her unaccountable for the quality of his/her work. In this respect, the author quite reasonably emphasizes that "an increased awareness of translator's contribution to institutional branding and institutional image could… lead to an increased concern for quality, with the added effect of higher translator's status and visibility" [Chiper. P. 202], which is praiseworthy, since we talk about translation craft where the cleverest samples — I mean it! — of humanity are involved.

Two indubitably interesting articles investigate into the discursive frames and discursive actions through which different institutions have been constructing arguments to legitimize a large gold and silver mining transnational development project funded by a Canadian company in central Transylvania, Romania. The paper is in fact part of a support to save Roşia Montană, a millennia-old settlement that could disappear should the mining operations begin. Chiper dwells on the texts, discourses and genres used in pleading for or against Roşia Montană project. She is good at bringing together economy, economics and linguistics through the notions of performatives, signifiers and primary frameworks, that is, socially constructed schemata that allow humans to construct the meaning of situations and events [Chiper. P. 100]. It is quite obvious that "discourse is tailored so as to fulfill the functions of promotion and sell goods, services as well as organizations…" An argument that follows sounds very fresh and topical: the Roşia Montană case displays both an overlapping of globalizations and publics [Chiper. P. 117, 119].

The volume boasts of observations that are worthwhile indeed. One of them looks like a manifesto of those who work the field of culture studies. It is carefully thought of, beautifully phrased and deserves being quoted here, so that it can be shared among the whole wide linguistic community: "Intercultural communication competence can reveal its potential to contribute to the creation of a better world, that suffers less from conflicts and finds the (discursive and not only) means to heal wounds, to reconcile, to build mutual trust and highlight our common humanity and desire for peace, prosperity, and happiness" [Chiper. P. 179].

It stands to reason that language plays a more significant role in contemporary socio-economic changes than it did in the past. Therefore, discourse analysis has the potential to contribute extensively to the research of the transformations in current society [Chiper. P. 15]. A very interesting reading is offered in parts that deal with discourse analysis of university communications: universities have started to give more attention to their public discourse which is perceived as an instrument of attaining competitive advantages. Universities are using discourse to show their participation in and commitment to the discourse of European Union documents [Chiper. P. 31].

However, in her argument of the university discourse, Chiper (probably incidentally) enumerates contradictory features that, in her opinion, the university discourse follows. The discourse should be "anti-rhetorical, positivist and empirical, individualistic, egalitarian, public, instrumental and anti-personal" [Scollon and Scollon as referred to in Chiper. P. 25].

I would say it is a long line of contradictory terms — individualistic versus public versus anti-personal versus egalitarian. In my opinion, the author is sometimes under the impression of more or less known names which does not allow her to be critical about papers she quotes from. Moreover, S. Chiper writes a few pages above: "One of the roles of the external promotional communication is to create a sense of identity" [Chiper. P. 20]. A sense of identity can hardly be created in case it is anti-personal, public, and egalitarian.

I have found a very peculiar explanation for Americanisms in Romanian in the following passage: Romanian language has assimilated a large number of English borrowings. Such assimilation has been the result of the speakers' high esteem for the American culture and their desire to share a part of it [Chiper. P. 25]. In my opinion, culture has little to do with it. The explanation is purely linguistic one. Borrowings are found in all the languages. Borrowed terms clumsily penetrate a language and do not accept elementary signs of the local language, for example, suffixes or endings, if we talk of synthetic languages. Borrowings are inevitable, quite often they remain alien, but later they get assimilated. As an example, in modern Russian there are almost no primordial words that begin with the letter A, these are almost all borrowed words. This is a result of the Russian language evolution rather than the Russian "desire to share a part" of whatever culture an A-word comes from.

S. Chiper argues that in the case of university discourse the adoption of English words has political motivations. The reform of the educational system is currently perceived as a reform of institutions and as a reform of language. The language innovations illustrate the promise and the commitment to innovation [Chiper. P. 26]. I suppose that alien (foreign, immigrant) words and notions that penetrate a language, go on existing in the target language and target culture. The relations of commercial organizations are expanded onto other fields, for instance, science and education, so that paid-for education services are depicted with the use of a term commodification (that comes from *commodity*), its peak being mcdonaldization [2. P. 10–11] (the term comes from the name of a transnational fast food corporation). Just like fast food companies, education institutions may turn into fast education companies. So the motivation is far from being political, it is pragmatic and economic.

These are just trifling comments. The book is timely and innovative, it tackles practical aspects of discourse analysis that has been badly needed.

References

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