

Sign use, social patterns, and mentalities: A semiotic approach to discourse

Martin Siefkes, Technical University of Chemnitz

Abstract:

How can we understand discourses as semiotic practices, generalizing from language-centered theories towards a general semiotic theory of discourse? This talk proposes to define discourse in the context of Roland Posner's theory of cultural semiotics, which distinguishes three areas of culture: material culture (artefacts and texts), mental culture (codes and knowledge), and social culture (individuals and institutions).

On this basis, a model is proposed that describes discourses as sign practices that encompass patterns on three levels – textual, mental, and social patterns –, as well as causal and semiotic connections between these levels. A further level is included to delimitate discourses from each other.

Introducing the theoretical notion of “discourse patterns”, which correspond to hypotheses about connections between levels, the semiotic 4-level-model of discourse allows us to explicate the assumptions that guide approaches to discourse analysis (e.g. various quantitative and qualitative approaches, CDA, citation and link analysis). It complements existing multi-level approaches (such as DIMEAN) by providing a conclusive semiotic account of inter-level connections.

The developed theory is routed in precise semiotic terminology and is applicable to the analysis of patterns in sign use in all semiotic modes (in the sense of: sign systems). It is therefore a multimodal theory of discourse that allows the analysis of connections between meaning-making in all areas and sign systems that comprise a culture, and connect them (via indexical sign relations) with social developments and recurring mental (or cognitive) patterns that can be detected in a specific culture.

Keywords:

discourse analysis, theory of culture, sociology, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), multilevel approaches, multimodality, semiotics

Format of presentation:

Talk

Affiliation and contact details:

Dr. Martin Siefkes
Technische Universität Chemnitz
Philosophische Fakultät
Institut für Germanistik und Kommunikation (IfGK)
Professur Germanistische Sprachwissenschaft
Straße der Nationen 62
D-09111 Chemnitz

martin@siefkes.de
<http://www.siefkes.de/en>