Patricia Bou-Franch and Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (Eds.), **Analyzing Digital Discourse: New Insights and Future Directions**, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 400 pp., $127.85 (hardcover).

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Digital technologies have greatly expanded the ways in which people communicate, form social relationships, and engage in discourse practices. The past three decades have seen an increasing interest in digital discourse, and various attempts have been made to take account of new developments. This timely volume provides a state-of-the-art survey of the proliferation of models, approaches, and applications in the field and explores future directions. In the following, I will first introduce the major content of each chapter and then critically review the achievements and limitations of this volume.
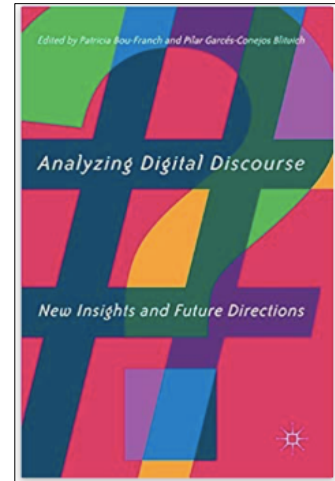
Doing discourse analysis in the digital era has presented great challenges as well as opportunities for discourse analysts. *Analyzing Digital Discourse: New Insights and Future Directions* addresses this question by exploring the three important aspects of contemporary digital communication: its multimodal nature, the mediated co-construction of identity and sociability, and the discursive construction of ideologies online.

This volume is composed of five parts and 13 chapters, authored by as many as 20 famous scholars from around the world in the field of discourse analysis. In this way, the editors have put together researchers with complementary strengths. And as a result, interesting synergies have emerged.

In Part I's introduction (chapter 1), editors Blitvich and Bou-Franch point out that this volume aims to offer new insights and identify future directions for the analysis of digital discourse. The development of digital discourse analysis is reviewed in terms of three waves. Multimodal critical discourse studies and critical technocultural discourse analysis are identified as new approaches to move the field forward.

Part II, "Past, Present and Future," is comprised of only one chapter in which Herring provides a historical retrospective of computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) in line with the three phases of technological advancement. She proposes a multimodal CMDA paradigm to cope with each semiotic mode of digital discourse on the levels of structure, meaning, interaction management, and social behavior.

Part III, "Multimodality," contains four chapters that examine how users employ various multimodal resources in digital communication. Chapter 3 discusses both verbal and nonverbal communicative strategies in video-mediated communication (VMC), with those nonverbal strategies including kinesics, gaze, and proxemics. It also analyzes students' transcription and annotation of VMC, with an aim to unveiling their ideologies on language, and thereby offers some educational implications. Chapter 4 focuses on seven types of text-picture combinations in image macro memes. The linguistic mode determines the interpretation of a certain meme, while visual modes may illustrate, amplify, elaborate, or change linguistic information. Ad hoc visual referent adjustment, a new inferential strategy, is proposed to interpret memes. Chapter 5 examines the characteristics and communicative functions of digital and written quotations in the opinion review genre and examines the embeddedness of quotations in the sequential organization. It also illustrates how quotations affect and construct the news genre of political opinion review. Chapter 6 investigates how gender differences manifest in the use of emoticons in WhatsApp interactions among Spanish members. It concludes that women profusely employ emoticons, while men only make sparse use of these technological affordances. However, both genders desire to build friendships and enhance their relationships through emoticons.

Part IV, "Face and Identity," consists of three chapters (7–9) illustrating the importance and uniqueness of identity construction and negotiation in digital discourse, and one chapter (10) discussing linguistic strategies for online face-repairing or restoration. Chapter 7 examines how Amazon reviewers use technological affordances and linguistic resources to perform and construct gendered identities and related ideologies. Generally, reviewers often participate in normative discourses by circulating and reproducing normative gender ideologies, as well as by engendering certain products through discourses. Specifically, legitimate review writers construct, reify, and engender products through their discourse, while parody review writers appear to deconstruct, undo, and critique the engenderment of such products. Chapter 8 explores the construction of expert identities or lay participant identities in four different online health practices: (1) static websites where experts offer advices; (2) online columns where experts and laymen exchange letters; (3) dyadic email exchanges; (4) a health-minded forum. Creating expertise in an online health context involves the strategies embedded in websites and the interplays of several linguistic positioning strategies. Chapter 9 investigates the interconnections of self-presentation and self-branding in professional digital settings. Professionals employ both verbal resources and interactive affordances embedded in social network technology to construct identities. Chapter 10 focuses on the corrective facework employed by participants in the Facebook genre of public common interest groups. The group members more frequently employ other-repairing strategies, rather than self-repairing strategies, to maintain intragroup cohesion and stress the group's unity.

Part V, "Language and Media Ideologies," contains three chapters focusing on language ideologies in digital discourse. Chapter 11 explores the construction, reproduction, and performance of multiple masculine identities by heterosexual young men within the context of sexting. Based on interviews and guided discussions, the sexualized youth cyberculture is found to be characterized by male sexual agency, empowerment, and dominant gendered norms. Chapter 12 discusses how politeness is conceptualized in digital discourse in Greek. Twitter users quote network resources and orient to networked audiences to construct knowledgeable identities for a positive self-presentation. This representation is tied to powerful ideologies associated with the positive view of cultural individuals in the Greek culture. Chapter 13 examines the effect of pedagogy on metalinguistic awareness of emergent norms of digitally mediated communication. The

qualitative analysis of self-reporting comments from students also reveals that their judgments of appropriateness and norm adherence affect the presentation of self.

Context

Digital discourse first garnered serious academic attention in the 1990s with the works of Herring (1996) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) sparking interest in discussing how users adopt a variety of multimodal resources to achieve communicative goals in computer-mediated communication (CMC). Since then, an increasing number of researchers have examined the uniqueness of different semiotic modes of communication from different perspectives. In the following, I will examine the frequency of the term *digital discourse* as it appears in topics over the period 1990 to 2019, as retrieved by the database Web of Science. It needs to be noted that the two main parameters to refine search findings in this database are topics and titles. In order to present a relatively complete picture of the status quo of digital discourse studies, I set the parameter to be topics.

Figure 1 displays the frequency of the term *digital discourse* over the period 1990–2019.
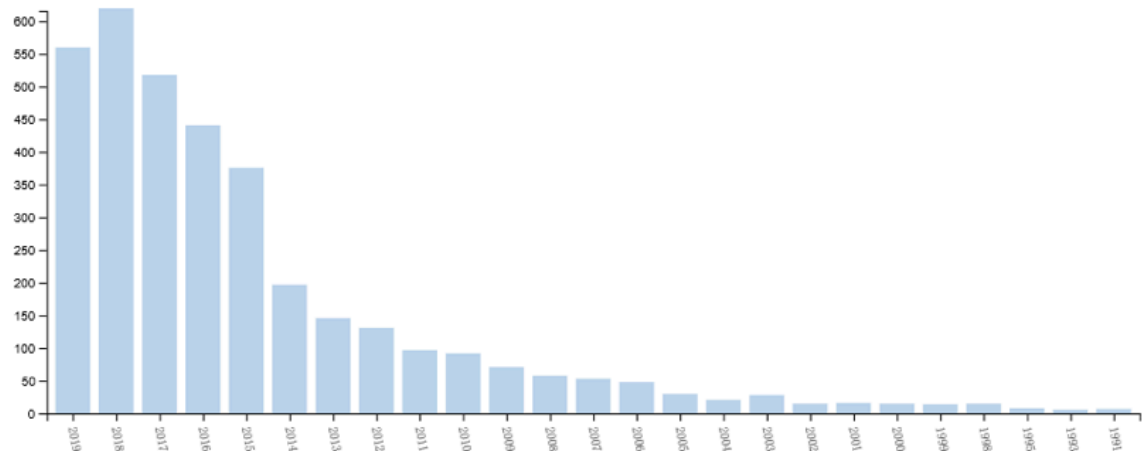

Figure 1. The frequency of the term digital discourse in topics, 1990–2019.
Source: *Web of Science.*[1]

As can be seen, while steadily growing in number during the period from 2005 to 2014, the number of academic studies of digital discourse increased markedly from 2015 to 2018. This is probably because an increasing number of alternative approaches to the analysis and theorization of digital discourse emerged.

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[1] I also examined the frequency of the term *computer-mediated discourse* and the combined frequencies of these two terms. The overall patterns follow that of *digital discourse*, because instances of *computer-mediated discourse* are relatively few.

However, there is a slight decline in the amount of related works in 2019 (i.e., 581 instances), in comparison with that of 2018 (i.e., 657 instances).

Figure 1 illustrates an overall growth in work over the last 15 years. Especially in the last five years, the number of relevant works reaches a peak. However, different authors have different foci, employing various methods and leading to converging or diverging research findings. The result of this seems to be a jungle. Therefore, the job for newcomers to this field is daunting. They may be puzzled about where to start. In addition, the figure shows a slight decline in frequency in 2019, adding to the complexity of the issue. This timely volume is like a map for readers to navigate the jungle. It reviews the achievements made over the last two decades and looks for new directions to move forward the field of digital discourse analysis, thus helping readers to consider where they stand and where they can go.

Critique

Tracing Development Trajectories of the Digital Discourse Analysis

This volume reviews the development of digital discourse analysis in accordance with the advancement of technology. Phase I was the pre-Web period (1983–1993), and the modes of CMC were text only. Researchers adopted descriptive linguistic approaches and discussed medium-related patterns of language use such as acronyms, abbreviations, message sequences, turn-taking, and so forth. Research findings are mostly concerned with the effects of those structural features on meaning making (Ferrara, Brunner, & Whittemore, 1991; Murray, 1988). Phase II was the Web 1.0 period (1994–2004). The technological advancement in audio and video chat in addition to textual communication has broadened research scopes to include identity, online community, and interaction management, among other things (Garcia & Jacobs, 1998; Georgakopoulou, 1997; Herring, 2004). The CMDA paradigm is extended to incorporate multimodal resources. Phase III was the Web 2.0 (2004–2017) period, in which Web technology saw further development in the emergence of user-generated content and social platforms. Researchers develop the CMDA paradigm to conduct corpus analysis and adopt critical perspectives in discussing issues of "translocality" and "transmediality," focusing on local practices and multimodality resources respectively (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Georgakopoulou & Spiliotti, 2016; Tagg & Seargeant, 2014).

Over the course of its history, CMDA changes its foci along with technological advances in CMC. With the development in technology and the emergence of social network platforms, researchers shift their foci from structural features to topics such as multimodality, politeness, identities, relational work, and language ideologies. However, new technological developments such as machine learning and artificial intelligence have not received scholars' attention, even though they may be affecting computer-mediated discourse.

Reviewing the Major Achievements and Looking Forward to the Future

This volume is a collection of research on discourse and communication in various languages and digital spaces, from consumer reviews and health forums to social networking and video interaction. All papers examine issues at the forefront of current research and present latest findings.

One of the challenges facing the multimodality in digital discourse is that the description of nonverbal semiotics is more often separated from social cultural context at the macro level (Jewitt, 2009). In fact, the wealth of multimodal resources is applied in various aspects of social life, working together to manifest users' ideologies, identities, etc., and create interpersonal meaning. Combing the description of different semiotics with macro sociological research is an important direction for the study of multimodality. Works in the recent decade have yielded interesting results with regard to a wide range of social aspects such as power asymmetry, gender, and other contextual factors. For example, Lemke (2012) brings together discourse analysis and visual semiotics and examines how these two aspects interact with each other to create meaning. Yus (2014) analyzes the functions of emoticons from a relevance-theoretic perspective and explores how emoticons contribute to the identification of users' attitudes, feelings, and emotions. In addition, chapters 7–9 in this volume examine how various technological and linguistic affordances work together in the performance of identity in digital discourse. Chapter 10 illustrates how social processes underlying the formation and maintenance of community are performed through face repairing strategies on Facebook. In short, carrying out multimodal discourse analysis within the macro social context helps to illustrate the dialectics of discourse and society. Meanwhile, it offers new insights for the study of society, culture, and so on.

Another challenge facing digital discourse analysis is to expand paradigms by adopting "broader qualitative and critical perspectives" (p. 12). According to Thurlow (2017), a critical perspective on digital discourse should examine the ways in which microlevel practices construct social worlds and how macrolevel structures and ideologies shape communicative practices. Chapters 11 and 12 adopt a critical perspective on social media platforms and communities, including British sexters and Greek Twitter, and focus on the microlevel of digital discourse where language ideologies are constantly constructed and reconstructed. Chapter 13 touches upon the way in which ideologies shape digital practices, that is, students' presentation of self. The foci of these three chapters also coincide with O' Halloran and Smiths' (2011) proposal that ideology and attitude can be manipulated directly by language and indirectly by visual signs.

Furthermore, this cutting-edge volume lays down exciting new paths for future research. It has highlighted the three important aspects of contemporary digital communication: multimodality, mediated identity construction, and language ideologies. Issues such as the manifestations of these aspects and the interplay among them will remain the foci of the field in the future.

Adopting a Multidisciplinary Approach to Digital Discourse

Digital discourse analysis is concerned with how multimodal, multisemiotic resources are employed to enact identities, activities, and ideologies in the digital world, as part of a larger social world (Gee, 2005). Therefore, the analysis of digital discourse lies at the intersection of (non)language resources, society, and technology. Digital researchers can draw on a range of diverse socially oriented language disciplines, such as ethnography, sociology, psychology, communication, sociolinguistics, and discourse studies, and employ their methods and research tools. In other words, CMC needs to become highly interdisciplinary (p. 7). Contributions to this volume have been purposefully selected to reflect that wide diversity.

In terms of research methods, this volume is no longer confined to the traditional descriptive method but has employed various methods. Chapter 4 applies cognitive pragmatics theories (i.e., a cyberpragmatic approach) to the study of digital discourse, which represents a clear case of the cross-fertilization with other fields. In addition, chapters 4–6 are perfect examples of a multimodal approach to digital discourse. This approach enables us to see how various nonverbal aspects work with more complex factors such as culture and gender to create interpersonal meanings. Chapter 9 moves the field of digital discourse analysis forward by adopting mixed methods. The method of corpus study is used in analyzing identity construction strategies; meanwhile, a critical perspective is adopted to examine the social meanings of the technology itself. Chapter 12 also resorts to corpus in discussing "common sense" ideologies of Greek politeness.

Limitations

In spite of the above-mentioned merits, there are also some weaknesses related to this volume. Given the great importance of multimodality, many nonverbal aspects of digital discourse, such as the brevity of a website and visual aspects of the layout of a website, have been strengthened in the volume. However, other multimodal aspects such as gaze, gesture, and hand movement do not receive equal attention as the embedded technological affordances. In fact, those physical behaviors interact with technological affordances and other modes such as text and speech to create meaning. Only by considering different aspects of multimodal resources can we have a relatively full picture of multimodality in digital discourse.

Moreover, while some topics, such as identity and ideology, have received more attention, some other areas like relational work and interpersonal relationships in digital discourse have been discussed more generally. Meanwhile, emotion in digital context has barely been touched upon in this volume. The vast literature reveals that in face-to-face communication, there exist interwoven relationships among the concepts of identity, emotion, and interpersonal relationship. In CMC, these factors also play an important role in meaning making. A deep discussion of them can strengthen our understanding of digital discourse, for instance, how emotion and identity interact with each other in digital context to create interpersonal meaning and how digital practices contribute to the formation of certain kinds of social relationships, social identities, and social realities. Therefore, the interaction among these factors deserves more research attention.

However, these are minor weaknesses and are easily outweighed by the engaging and valuable contribution this volume makes to digital discourse studies.

Conclusion

Analyzing Digital Discourse has reviewed the achievements of digital discourse analysis, traced development trajectories, offered new insights, and suggested future directions. As such, it serves as an excellent resource for newcomers like undergraduate and graduate students interested in learning more about digital discourse, for general linguistic researchers exploring new territory, and for experienced digital discourse researchers looking to extend their research scope. Furthermore, it might help individuals living in this digital age to cope with digital communication and build harmonious interpersonal relationships with others online.

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