

# Discourse and Digital Practices: Doing Discourse Analysis in the Digital Age

Ling Jiang

School of Foreign Languages, Southwest University of Political Science and Law, Chongqing, China

Email: jiangling115@126.com

**How to cite this paper:** Jiang, L. (2019). Discourse and Digital Practices: Doing Discourse Analysis in the Digital Age. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 9, 92-96.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2019.92009>

**Received:** March 22, 2019

**Accepted:** April 22, 2019

**Published:** April 25, 2019

Copyright © 2019 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

Taking a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach, *Discourse and digital practices* addresses the central issue of how traditional analytical tools developed from discourse analysis can be used to analyze new communication practices associated with digital media. It also shows the way discourse analysts are challenged in analyzing digital practices by adapting traditional analytical approaches and developing new theories and methodologies. The book stands out as a cutting-edge book in digital discourse studies with its wide range of digital practices from video gaming, “curation”, tagging, social networking to apps, and its in-depth discussion of the current key topics like “discourse and identities in the digital world”, “digital discourse and education”, and “digital practices and power relations”. It provides deep insights and will be of great value for those working in the fields of discourse analysis, media studies, multimodality and digital literacy studies.

## Keywords

Discourse Analysis, Digital Practices, Cutting-Edge, Multidisciplinary, Interdisciplinary

---

How to do discourse analysis in the digital era has presented a great challenge as well as opportunities for discourse analysts. *Discourse and digital practices* addresses this question in two directions: in one direction the book explores how traditional analytical tools developed from discourse analysis can be used to analyze new communication practices associated with digital media, and in another direction, it shows the way discourse analysts are challenged in analyzing digital practices by adapting traditional analytical approaches and developing new theories and methodologies.

The book brings together fourteen leading scholars from around the world in

the fields of discourse analysis and literacy studies, who have recently carried out pioneering research on discourse and literacy in the online world.

*Discourse and digital practices* comprises 15 chapters and in each chapter (excluding chapter 1) a particular type of digital media is analyzed.

Chapter 1 by Jones, Chik and Hafner is the introduction. Centering around four components of discourse analysis—texts, contexts, interactions, power and ideology, the authors present a general overview of the key theoretical and methodological concepts and ideas discussed in the following chapters and point out that some traditional and established theories and methods in discourse analysis have their potency in explaining digital discourse practices, and that in the meantime they need to be reconsidered and reformulated to adapt to the new circumstances.

By examining how a wide variety of semiotic elements in a video game are arranged to make meaningful sequences for performing certain game tasks, Gee in Chapter 2 proves that a video game also has the essential features of a text—*syntax and semantics, sequence, situated meaning, social and cultural contexts*, and there are substantial similarities of interactions in everyday life and video game playing.

Taking an integrated approach involving multimodal discourse analysis, cybernetics and media theory, Chapter 3 by Jones shows the reflexive ability of digital technologies to process texts and practices of reading and writing. In this chapter, Jones proposes three key essential ways of data processing in self-tracking apps: “resemiotization, retemporalization and recontextualization” (p. 37), which constrain and enlarge users’ choices in performing certain social actions, such as seeking information, understanding themselves and their relationship with others.

Chapter 4 by Barton examines tagging practices on Flickr from a social practice view and concludes that seemingly loose or “sloppy” tags are not isolated or separate but are related with each other internally and externally to contribute to various social practices.

Vasquez in Chapter 5 analyzes how online reviewers draw upon different texts, discourses and genres to build their own review texts, indicating that there are intertextuality and discursivity in online reviews, through which not only different texts and genres are connected, but the social relationships between reviewers and other users of the texts are built.

Chapter 6 by Benson explores how the categories of “exchange”, “turn”, “move”, “act” developed in Conversation Analysis can be applied to analyze the multimodal discourse of YouTube pages, which proves to be “a product of interactional processes” (p. 94).

Chapter 7 & 8 both touch upon the topic of identity in online discourse from the perspective of positioning theory. Taking one of the claims of Positioning Theory that position is fluid and discursively negotiated and constructed, Hafner in Chapter 7 examines how a range of digital tools, combined with multimodal discursive resources in the online virtual world of Moshi Monsters, exert a deep

impact on the identity construction of children, where positionings are largely taken up by child players who are performing tasks created by the designers. Chapter 8 by Chik deals with the same issue in another digitally mediated context—Language Learning Social Networking Sites (LLSNSs). In the chapter, the author begins with the various modes of positioning introduced in Positioning Theory and demonstrates how the textual and other semiotic resources with particular social networking features work together to contribute to language learning process and the representation of the different modes of positioning on the websites Duolingo and Busuu.

Chapter 9 by King addresses the issue that although corpus-assisted discourse analysis (CADA) is challenged when dealing with digital practices like chat talk on sex, “deepened subjectivity” involving the researcher’s observation and intuition will be called upon, enabling the researcher a new critical insight into “sex talk” online: “these “public” chat rooms are predominantly places to socialize rather than places to take part in “cyber-sex” (p. 140).

Chapter 10 by Merchant provides a detailed microanalysis of how the material and technological affordances iPads and apps make available for young children and their adult carers help to support young children’s early literacy development.

Drawing from the philosophy of technology, Carrington in Chapter 11 suggests that the technological artefact like an iPhone exhibits an “intentionality”, where the way young people perceive the world and how they act upon it is to a certain extent shaped by the artefact and reflected in the polymedia situated discourse.

Informed by geosemiotics and linguistic landscape research, Chapter 12 by Lee focuses on the display of the internet-specific language features in physical public spaces in Hongkong and explores how meanings and ideologies of the “Netspeak” are reconstructed in offline spaces, contributing to what is known as the “enregisterment” of internet language in Hongkong.

Taking a Foucaultian critical discourse approach, together with an ethnographic methodology, Chapter 13 by Marsh centres on the discursive production of social practices of children and young people in Club Penguin Music Videos (CPMVs), where values of “recognition, status and competition” in celebrity culture have been reproduced and reinforced in this peer-to-peer interaction, which sheds light on the nature of children and young people’s digital practices and also has implications for researchers and educators interested in online digital activities.

Snyder in Chapter 14 examines the various forms “curation” has presented in the fields of digital marketing, online communication, education online and digital literacy studies, offering deep insights for researchers and educators who need to think about how to develop strategies to raise children and young people’s critical awareness of the complex relationships between language, power, identity and social practices in digital times.

Through analyzing the discursive construction of two broad categories of digital education—digital “re-schooling” and digital “de-schooling”, Selwyn in Chap-

ter 15 tries to dig out the ideological and power agendas implicit in digital education and finally concludes that education in the digital age is “more individualised, elitist, competitive, market-driven, omnipresent and de-emotionalised” (p. 238), which are the values that have actually dominated education in the past several decades.

The book is characterized by several features: first, it is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, involving a diverse range of theories and approaches from discourse analysis, conversational analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, critical linguistics, and multimodal studies to other disciplines like ethnography, cybernetics, geosemiotics. Two or more of these are often integrated and complementary to each other to enhance the adequacy in description and interpretation. Second, the topical issues range widely, covering the relationship between “discourse and identities in the digital world”, “digital discourse and education”, “digital practices and power relations”, “multimodality and digital discourse” and “multilingualism and online language”, which are the central questions in this cut-edging research. Third, it is representative in the study of digital discourses. The book draws examples from a variety of digital texts and practices including video gaming, “curation”, tagging on Flickr, video sharing on YouTube, language learning on social network websites, which represent the latest developments in digital technologies and the up-to-date research on digital discourse analysis. Last but not the least, the book takes a dynamic view on discourse, emphasizing that discourse constructs and represents social practice, and the individualized digital practice is situated in a broader social and cultural backgrounds, developing “the nexus of practice” (Scollon, 2011). However, there are still some drawbacks in the book. For example, it takes a multimodal perspective on digital discourse but ignores the diversity of resources for constructing social practice, since the resources are varied, including technological and psychological instruments (Tang & Li, 2015).

Written in a clear and accessible style, this book is organized around the theme of affordances and constraints of different analytical and theoretical tools by examining a rich set of digital practices from diverse theories and methods. It provides deep insights and will be of great value for those working in the fields of discourse analysis, media studies, multimodality and digital literacy studies.

### Funding

This work was supported by the grant from MOE (Ministry of Education in China) of Humanities and Social Sciences [Project18XJC740003].

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

### References

Scollon, R. (2001). *Mediated Discourse: The Nexus of Practice*. London and New York:

Routledge.

Tang, Q. Y., & Li, Q. (2015). A New Approach to Discourse Studies-Mediated Discourse Analysis. *Journal of University of Science and Technology Beijing (Social Sciences Edition), No. 5*, 35-40.