

Conclusion: Re-evaluating Eclecticism

Rebekah Johnson

Teachers College, Columbia University

When looking at the original data analysis, we see a variety of approaches used to examine the discourse data of focus. The analysis is rich and includes a wide array of features. Conversely, the three single perspective analyses conducted for this Forum each drew upon different linguistic details to support their conclusions with different insights.

It is important to consider how different approaches can bring different foci to one set of data. The Pragmatics approach highlighted the use of negative and positive politeness and Gricean implicature. The Conversational Analysis (CA) approach focused on preferred and dispreferred speech as shown through pauses and elongation of sounds. In the Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS) analysis, framing and alignment were the primary aspects of focus. The original analysis used some concepts from several of these approaches and offered an overall richer examination in the sense of a greater variety of areas being explored. In the different perspectives, unequal attention is paid to each of the concepts or features. When considering how rich the description is using the eclectic approach, it seems that there is a benefit in promoting the understanding of a text in all of its dimensions. It is not surprising, however, that using a variety of approaches leads to a richer description in this way.

Eclecticism, however, can bring about methodological and theoretical difficulties when we go beyond a study's description to understand researchers' decisions about data collection and interpretation. For example, with CA, only the description of natural, spontaneous talk-in-interaction is allowed, whereas Pragmatics allows discourse completion tests of acceptability judgments based on a native speaker's intuitions, as well as natural spontaneous talk-in-interaction. In addition, CA looks at talk through the sequencing system, including prior turns and next turn proofs, but in Pragmatics, we may look at an utterance in isolation.

On the theoretical level, we risk conflict among frameworks. In the attempt to make sense of findings within multiple, possibly conflicting theoretical frameworks, we may find ourselves at a disadvantage in terms of evaluating the theoretical implications of our findings. The topics may be too varied, with inconsistent theoretical lenses used to treat them. For example, Tannen (1984, 1990, 1993), following Gumperz (1982), claims that individuals who come from different cultures can have differing interpretations of a particular signal or "contextualization cue." Conversely, CA says simply that we "do" culture as we talk. Alternatively, Pragmatics (particularly Cross-cultural Pragmatics or Interlanguage Pragmatics) explains culture as reflected in ways of speaking by members of different cultural and linguistic groups through comparison and the notion of acceptability.

In their study, Stubbe, Lane, Hilder, Vine, Vine, Marra, Holmes, and Weatherall (2003) conclude that each approach offers a different view of an interaction and there is value in gaining the insights from a variety of approaches to a piece of discourse. Similarly, we conclude that examining data from many angles can give us a broader picture of the discourse itself, but this only considers the *description* of the discourse. Too often, discourse analysis is primarily descriptive. However, we must not neglect theory.

The overall benefit of eclecticism is that description can be richer and more diverse. The danger is that when we try to build, extend, or revise theory, conflicting theoretical frameworks may lead us to theoretical "fuzziness."

In conclusion, we suggest that a multi-functional, multi-focused integration of approaches can be beneficial for examining and describing data. Eclecticism is particularly useful for the field of discourse analysis, considering that large stretches of text are examined, and it is useful to allow the multiplicity of all kinds of features to emerge from the discourse. However, we caution that although eclecticism can promote rich *description*, it can also lead researchers into a maze of conflicting theoretical frameworks that will limit the potential of the research to provide clear *explanation*.

REFERENCES

- Gumperz, J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Stubbe, M., Lane, C., Hilder, J., Vine, E., Vine, B., Marra, M., Holmes, J., & Weatherall, A. (2003). Multiple discourse analyses of a workplace interaction. *Discourse Studies*, 5, 351-388.
- Tannen, D. (1984). *Conversational style: Analyzing talk among friends*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Tannen, D. (1990). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York: Ballantine.
- Tannen, D. (Ed.) (1993). *Framing in discourse*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.