Developing Content-area Literacy in Teaching Culture: Understanding the Discourse of University Prospectuses

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to introduce a commonly used approach to language analysis in the social context, namely Critical Discourse Analysis, more specifically, James Paul Gee's strand, which incorporates both a theory of language-in-use and a method of research. The paper considers the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the approach and looks at the practical ways in which this model can be applied to cultural texts in the educational environment. To illustrate the applicability of the approach, some excerpts from university prospectuses are presented to show how they reflect the latest reforms in Higher Education in Britain. Their analyses indicate that a cross-curricular approach to teaching culture, i.e. one that combines traditional textual work with linguistic analysis, may lead to a greater cultural awareness. The study results from the surge in popularity of hybrid methodologies in teaching that call for providing instruction that goes beyond subject and content learning.

Keywords: literacy, discourse, understanding culture, hybrid methodology

Abstrakt
Celem pracy jest przedstawienie jednej z częściej stosowanych metod analizy języka w kontekście społecznym, tj. krytycznej analizy dyskursu, a dokładniej, podejścia Jamesa Paula Gee, które zawiera zarówno teorię języka jak i sposobu badania jego użycia. Praca rozważa podstawy teoretyczne i konceptualne podejścia i omawia praktyczne sposoby, w jaki model ten może być stosowany w środowisku edukacyjnym. Aby zilustrować przydatność podejścia, artykuł omawia fragmenty prospektów uniwersyteckich i pokazuje, w jaki sposób analiza dyskursu może odzwierciedlić ostatnie reformy w szkolnictwie wyższym w Wielkiej Brytanii. Ukazuje zatem, iż ponadprzedmiotowe podejście w nauczaniu kultury, tj. takie, które łączy tradycyjną pracę nad treścią z analizą językową, może prowadzić do większej świadomości kulturowej. Praca wynika z wzrostu zainteresowania metodami hybrydowymi w nauczaniu, które popularyzują wykraczanie poza temat i treść nauczania.

Słowa kluczowe: rozumienie tekstu, dyskurs, zrozumienie kultury, innowacje w nauczaniu

1. New literacies

Learning and teaching are no longer seen as passive processes of accumulating and presenting given knowledge. To function successfully in the present day world of multimodal texts – web surfing, channel surfing or network communication – people need to develop special literacies to move across different fields freely. They need to adapt to reality by being able to actively use and construct knowledge based on their educational experience as well as their own attempts to comprehend the world. They require a new methodology, or rather a varied methodology of teaching and learning in any disciplinary field, that may broaden their knowledge, enhance skills and boost self-confidence. Different types of texts, e.g. newspapers, advertisements, slogans or postings call for different types of background experience and skills to become meaningful (Wallace 2003, 8).

The search for new perspectives on literacy began in the 1990s in order to question the traditional, largely psychological or cognitive approach to literacy (Gee 1990, 42-43).

Soon, the New Literacy Studies initiative was launched that wished to set new trends. The name itself became a collective term that included work from varied perspectives, i.e. social, interactional, political, institutional or cultural, to mention just a few (Lankshear and Knobel 2007, 2). What was central to "new literacies" was not the ability to use technology or reading and communicating online. It was rather to investigate how literary practises could mobilize different kinds of values, priorities or sensibilities to those that people were familiar with (ibid., 7). New technologies may afford new ways of text transfer or creation but what really matters is how these practices enact new identities and mindsets. These, in Lewis's understanding, are connected with comprehending and experiencing "identities, patterns, and the ways of being in the world" (2007, 230). They might involve collaboration, experiencing authority or sociality rather than merely being involved in acts of reading or writing.

There are several potentially available approaches for researching new literacies. Among them is the sociocultural perspective; one that stresses that dealing with texts can only be done properly in the social, cultural, economic or political contexts of which they are a part (Lankshear and Knobel 2007, 2). The same view is supported by Wallace, who stresses that new literacies need to be social. Participating in any type of literary act unfolds in a social context, which allows readers and writers to enact their roles as members of communities they represent. In this way, they become part of the interactive process which posits "a shifting and dynamic relationship between text producers, text receivers and the text itself" (2003, 9).

Without question teaching and learning are social processes. In this vein, any orientated, critical reading of texts needs to be culturally specific. The goal is to provide students not only with some content disciplinary knowledge, e.g. British culture, but also promote insights into assumptions and practices that go along with these field texts (Wallace 2003, 47-8). This view is accepted by Lankshear and Knobel (2007, 2), who claim that sharing different perspectives enables the identification of common ground. Further, it acknowledges readings taken from different cultural perspectives. Dealing with particular texts in particular ways presupposes immersion in sociocultural practices, where participants not only read texts of some type or talk about them but "they hold certain attitudes and values and socially interact over them" (Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996, 3). The sociocultural approach, then, perceives one's educational process, be it reading, writing or speaking, as an integral element of social activity.

2. Gee's understanding of literacy

One of the most popular sociocultural approaches to the understanding of "new" literacy studies was fostered by Gee in 1990 in his *Social Linguistics and Literacies. Ideology and Discourse* (1990, 2008), supplemented and extended in *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis. Theory and Method* (2005, 2011). His work seems to have met the demand of educationalists and researchers, who have turned to critical text analyses to make sense of the ways in which people construct meanings (Rogers et al., 2005, 366). What Gee offers has appealed to those wishing to understand the implications of different language usage; indeed, most of his works are written in a highly accessible style and provide practical examples. It is only his newest publication, i.e. *How to do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit* (2011, 2014), that is meant for those who have already followed his methodology but need more detailed tools to analyse such complex issues as video games and their intonation, or multimodal texts (Gee 2014, 4-5).

What lies at the heart of Gee's theory is a mutual relationship between context and meaning. Language, be it words, literacy or text, gives meaning to contexts and contexts give meaning to language (Lankshear and Knobel 2007, 2). In a similar vein, Gee defines literacy in relation to Discourses, understood as socially recognized ways of using language. These may comprise reading, writing, speaking, listening, supplemented with gestures or semiotics such as sounds, graphics or images. Discourses are thus ways of thinking, believing, feeling or valuing. Such an approach to Discourse is of prime importance in any cultural or social context as it may allow the one who uses language properly to be identified with a particular group (Gee 2008, 156). As the author admits, the theory is meant for students or researchers in other areas who are interested in language, culture or institutions, as it may introduce them to one form of discourse analysis and advance their understanding of how language works in society "to create worlds, institutions and human relationships" (2011, 12).

Understood in such a way, language is just one dimension of Discourse. Gee (2011, 34) uses the term "discourse" (with a small "d") to refer to those linguistic elements, i.e. language bits, that are conventionally employed to relate to specific uses of language or stretches of language. Discourses with a capital "D" are socially acceptable situations in which the language used corresponds to proper ways of thinking or acting in the right place and time. Proper usage may help identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network. Thus, only when language bits are used to express particular ways of thinking, believing or valuing do they, according to Gee, constitute social

and cultural models – "D"iscourses, which together are constitutive and work to construct, maintain and transform social intersections (Rogers et al., 370).

The main tenets of Gee's theory (2011, 17-19) are that language lets us accomplish actions as it serves many functions. By using language, people may accomplish seven things in reality. The way they use language marks **significance**, i.e. the participants' attitudes or feelings towards the events. What is said has its **implications**. It signals who the doer is or who has any control. The way things are communicated enacts **identity**. Further, language is used to build social **relationship** or to convey certain **perspectives.** The way things are presented stresses their **connections.** Finally, language use shows its **sign system and knowledge**. All of these aspects are integrally linked to one another. They are based on the language-in-use data that is employed in particular contexts to allow the formulating of hypotheses, and the guiding of any analysis further, in order to point to phenomena entrenched in the real world.

Doing any Discourse analysis is thus a constant move from context to language and form language to context, as the term itself (from Latin *discursus* – 'to run to and fro') indicates. Also, work on language samples involves moving back and forth between what reflects and constructs the sociocultural world. Seen in this way, language cannot be perceived as neutral, because it is caught up in economic, social or cultural formations (Rogers et al., 2005, 369). For Gee, language means and does. When a piece of language is studied one can always ask themselves what they can learn about the context in which the language is used and how that context is constructed by the speaker or writer (2011, 20). In a similar vein, literacy practices are defined by Street. They are socially evolved activities, "particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts" (2001, 11).

The key to Discourses is a recognition that involves identifying a person as a particular type of **who** (identify) in a particular **what** (activity). This means putting language, interactions, values, beliefs, objects and tools together in such a way that one understands someone else's discursive practice (Gee 2011, 35). Further, because Discourses are always embedded in a medley of social worlds, like institutions, they are often accompanied by various "props" like symbols, objects, clothes, etc. As Gee (2011, 35) stresses, they are in sync. This "in sync-ness" informs who and what the person is (Lankshear and Knobel 2007, 6). However, Gee's intention is not to describe data, so that one can admire intricacy of language. Similarly to language use, his method can enable doing things. It can arouse one's interest in how language functions the way it does when it is put in action. This might be illuminating and provide evidence which shows that "language has

meaning only in and through social practices" (Gee 2011, 12). Further, it can contribute to one's knowledge in terms of understanding important issues in those areas that motivate people as global citizens.

The tools that help analyse how language works in building tasks in specific instances are relevant as they show how people construct identities and practices and recognise what these are built around. Gee's tools include **social languages** – styles, varieties, or vernacular language and the ways they are used and mixed. Together with the other 'stuff,' i.e. symbols, graffiti, colours, etc., they become **Discourses**. Consequently, Discourse combines and integrates language, actions, ways of thinking, believing and valuing in the way that it uses symbols, objects or tools that are socially recognisable. He also distinguishes **Conversations,** which are seen as societal debates on issues like terrorism or global warming that go on all around us. In other words, Conversations allude to all the themes or motifs that have been the focus of much talk or writing. Such societal discussions also influence the way people understand any new text they hear or read as it impinges on some others. Finally, debates lead to the notion of **Intertexuality,** i.e. a sort of reference to the already encountered words that allude to other texts or types of texts (Gee 2011, 28-29). As Wallace (2003, 41) underlines, well analysed texts may become intertextual points of reference for wider cultural observations.

Summing up, it may be said that a Discourse refer to some characteristic of saying, doing and / or being. People use its resources to project themselves as the kinds of persons they wish to be taken for. Through language, they project different identities in different situations, i.e. formal meetings or family reunions. The utterances have their meanings as they communicate **who** (a socially situated identity) and **what** (a situated practice). Also, institutions author and issue utterances through their "anonymous" texts and products which they circulate. As "who" and "what" are not really separable, utterances communicate an integrated **who-doing-what** (Gee 2011, 30). Such an understanding of Discourse situates any text within a broad perspective that integrates language, society and culture.

3. Gee's methodology in education

Gee's (2005, 2011) approach has become particularly important for educational researchers. His distinction between little "d" and big "D" Discourses offers a convenient approach to any text. Besides, his theory is inherently "critical" in the sense that it

involves potential social goods and their distribution, which do not need to be physical objects or artefacts. These are practices that impact and inform about hierarchies of power or one's reputation and status. Also a University Discourse can be perceived as a medley of certain language bits that are particular to academia, which are further associated with the values projected by a particular university (Rogers et al., 370). Each set of such language bits is tied to "some embodied action in the material and social world" (Gee 2013, 136). Besides, what is specific about Gee's approach is that the set of research tools and concepts that he uses to discuss his theory are not only his. He draws on a number of theoretical accomplishments as different DA approaches very often reach similar conclusions though they use different tools and terminologies connected to different micro-communities of researchers (Gee 2011, 10). Further, his perspective offers both a theory about the nature of language-in-use and a method of research. The domain to research is language-in-use, which is about saying-doing-being, and which gains its meaning from the practice of which it is an integral part and which it enacts (Gee 2011, 11).

Gee's approach is accessible at any level of instruction as the linguist distinguishes two aspects of grammar. The first denotes traditional sets of units: nouns verbs, phrases, and clauses. The other refers to grammatical units used to create patterns which signal characteristic *whos*-doing-*whats*. These patterns are collocational because they signal how various grammatical devices collocate among different units, which in turn collocate with non-language stuff to constitute conventional Discourses (2011, 50). This way, those involved in an analysis may start from small language bits, go through conventional grammar patterns and end with non-language stuff like symbols, colours or textual layouts. They may get access to the so called "hidden grammar," which is the ultimate goal of critical reading (Wallace 2003, 38).

The depth of one's analysis may vary, depending on the prior knowledge and experience. In this respect, foreign learners of English have advantage over native speakers as they already possess some explicit knowledge about the language they learn. Furthermore, they have a way of talking about it, i.e. metalanguage. They are used to talking about texts in terms of pronouns, subjects, and objects that can further construct propositional phrases to make ideological assumptions. They can readily accept Wallace's instruction in Hallidayan's terms – discourse's field, tenor or mode – or Gee's, which include intertextuality, situated worlds, etc. (Wallace 2003, 33). This way, teaching and learning particular kinds of awareness of literacy practices can be used both within schools and in real life. The aim of critical pedagogy is to make students aware of the existence of different forms of language in different settings and the implications

of such choices in certain circumstances. In this sense, as the author admits, Gee's tools and methods might be a good choice in conducting a course on reading literacy as it leads "beyond the specific and local" (Wallace 2003, 47).

In Gee's *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (2011, 51), one may encounter analyses of language excerpts done by means of traditional grammatical units, i.e. pronouns, modal verbs or in terms of the passive-non-passive voice, as well as academic grammar terms such as deverbal nouns, complex predicates, or assertive modifiers. In this way, Gee shows that the work on a text can be done at any level of instruction. What is important for him is that no single grammatical feature marks social language. They come in bundles that form distinctive configurations. Such units cannot be learnt outside distinctive social practices as they are part of their very "voice." To understand the "voice" of the text, one must learn to recognise its social context. This implies immersion in situated practices if they are to be understood properly.

As Wallace (2003, 43) indicates, teachers might begin with situated practices, raising students' awareness of literary events and artefacts. Then, they could move on to more explicit instructions on analysing specific language with its built-in critical perspectives. By drawing hypotheses from these small bits of writing data based on mutual considerations of context and language in use, students may turn to additional data to guide them further. In the process their confidence may rise if they encounter other examples that appear to illustrate their hypotheses. This way students may see that their hypotheses are entrenched in real problems, institutional conflicts or changes and indicate some real social and political issues (Gee 2011: 25-26). In Rogers' view (2004, 3-8), by doing such analyses, students are involved, for example, in being critical, which she sees as questioning and not taking for granted everything that language presupposes; being reflexive, i.e. considering how one's positionality impacts one's interpretation of things; or being comparative; that is paying attention to texts' similarities, differences and the implications which these may have.

4. Understanding culture through critical analyses

The developments in the British Higher Educational system in the last few decades can also be analysed in terms of Gee's conceptual framework – as actions enacted by policies of the subsequent governments. As language does things and builds the world, the subsequent bills and regulations may be perceived as actions that transformed the system.

Formerly, public universities were non-profit organisations. They were known for their quality of education based on the results of their graduates and their performance in the careers they embarked upon. The reputation was the sole image of universities and their promotional value. Each was identified by the logo and name as other promotional elements were not needed.

To understand the present condition and policies of UK Higher Education, as well as the way the sector functions, one has to go back to the reforms put forward by the Thatcher government in the eighties, which already in the 1979 manifesto pledged to reduce "waste, bureaucracy and over-government" (Finlayson and Hayward, 4). What followed was a direct consequence of the way British universities started to operate. The former system of collegiality, with administrative positions assigned on a solidarity basis, was promptly abolished. Further radical changes took place after 1997, under Labour and then the Conservatives, when the Thatcherite concepts of "value for money" and "efficiency" were supplanted by a more radical understanding of how the University was supposed to function. Economic "dynamism" became the key word of all successive reforms and documents. Policies and reviews indicated the goals that university education was supposed to pursue, among which increased revenues and improved economic efficiency stood out (Finlayson and Hayward, 13). Finally, in accepting Lord Browne's review of 2010, Cameron's coalition government finished the process of the sector's privatisation, with further recommendations of opening it to privately-owned corporations (Hall, 5). Thus, it may be said that all governments in power since the 1980s have in their policies enacted new institutional solutions with their new procedures, public roles and services.

The corporatization of public universities in Britain resulted in the appearance of a different sort of language that was visible in their promotional materials, which Fairclough referred to as "the marketization of public discourse" (1993, 133). Its introduction seemed necessary as public universities started to be treated as any other institutions which were supposed to actively promote their developments and services. Their discourse, as Wernick, underlines, became a vehicle for "selling' goods, services, organisations, ideas or people" (1991, 181). It aimed at attracting students and managing increasing global competition. Consequently, academic institutions started to issue their prospectuses, which together other newly generated materials: brochures, leaflets or flyers, have become a "genre of consumer advertising" (Fairclough 1993, 146).

Beside information on programmes, academic prospectuses include such elements as mottos, slogans, mission statements, profiles of the institution, information

on facilities, prospective careers, accessible grants as well as entry requirements and contacts. By mixing features of different types of texts, which is referred to as hybridity, academic promotional materials have become a part of the wider intertextuality process (Branston 2006, 55). Being under pressure, universities started to operate like businesses, competing to sell their products to customers. It became evident in their language, which Fairclough described as the neo-liberal discourse of economic change that demanded "adjustments" and "reforms" to enhance "efficiency and adaptability" (2003, 100-101). Accordingly, university brochures, prospectuses or fliers could be seen as persuasive disseminators of cultural values. The traditional image of public universities, independent of political and, to a large extent societal influence, has largely disappeared.

Thus, while studying the issue of British Higher Education, one may consider the governmental reforms, data and statistics that show the effects of changes introduced in the system in order to understand how it has been modified in time. On the other hand, one may try to assess texts connected with academia to practically assess the implications of the reforms, the significance of particular institutions or the identities and perspectives they enact and convey. Such an approach to understanding culture may point to real phenomena entrenched in the real world. For the purpose of the arguments presented in the article, two prospectuses were chosen: *Courses 2016* from the University of Oxford, the most prestigious academic institution in Britain; and *Undergraduate Prospectus 2016. Celebrating Our Diamond Jubilee*, issued by the University of Exeter, a leading educational provider established in 1955. Out of each, the first two pages and the Archaeology course offers were selected for analysis. This choice was determined by this particular course being one of the traditional ones offered at any university, which would in a way guarantee that the texts are not saturated with the most popular marketing notions that are characteristic of the new departments and their offers, as might be the case with Media Studies, Business and Management or Clean Energy.

4. 1 An analysis of the Oxford University prospectus

At first sight both texts appear to include similar features and share many discursive practices but the ratio of particular choices, the layout of the provided information and consequently the form/meaning differ to a great extent. The *Courses 2016* prospectus from the University of Oxford places a short paragraph on its cover that seems striking due to its content and register. The passage refers to a wide choice of Oxford courses but

its primary function seems to be expressive, where the addressee, its prospective student, is constructed as an object of affection. It is visible in the personalised style of the offer, i.e. “we” the university, and “you” the addressee, which is more typical of promotional advertising than educational register. Further, the use of colloquial expressions “exactly what you want,” “lots of” or “make sure” seems to reinforce the appeal to any potential reader. It is the more sophisticated phrases such as “explore the entire breadth of subjects” or “we recommend that” that put the reader back in the right perspective. Also, the following pages enumerating available courses and their categories accompanied by items – “essential”, “recommended,” “helpful” – seem to fulfil the requirements of discursive features of a professional education genre. No catchy phrases, mottos or self-promotional elements are visible.

The Oxford section devoted to the Archaeology and Anthropology course is more inter-discursively complex. It articulates a variety of genres and can thus be seen as a hybridised form. The two-page text, pages 16 and 17, starts with elements of a narrative which, through its reference to the past and tradition, project the university in an impersonal, distant and conservative voice. The first three paragraphs nominalise the name of the course, i.e. “Archaeology and anthropology together,” “The Oxford degree” or “Oxford’s Archaeology & Anthropology.” As Wallace notices, through such strongly schematised order with its headings, initial positions and opening lines, the text underlines the significance of the internal organisation of the institution. People are meant to be “receivers” of transitive verbs, whose agent – the university – enacts “action in which they participate” (2003, 41). Furthermore, such metonymic usage may be seen as a promotional element that stresses the authority of the institution and its course.

The element of personalisation, which is typical of promotional materials, is visible only in the section devoted to students’ prospects, which is located further down in the fourth paragraph. While, in discussing the opportunities available at the university and the research sites, the paragraph refers to the prospective student as “you.” Strong presuppositions concerning the student’s progress and employability are made in the form of declarative statements with the modal use of “will,” as in “you will explore how..,” “get to grips with…” or “learn why…” etc. Finally, the use of pronouns accentuates the phatic function, which constructs a close relationship between the student – “you” – and “our tutor.”

It is only at the end of the course’s text, visible at the side column accompanying page 16, where careers and additional information are discussed, that one can see more features of promotional and advertising genres. The items – “successful,” “you can get

a loan," "career opportunities," "opportunities in advertising, energy supply, media" as well as "available," "see podcasts" or "find out more" – may indicate that Oxford University, the institution that should be seen as the one that can afford to resist the latest promotional trends, has not escaped the marketization process.

All the above textual and discursive features together with the University's logo, a well-chosen visual, i.e. a photo of an archaeological site, and a careful layout of information, constitute what Gee assumes to be Discourse. This socially and culturally constructed language enacts a situated identity of Oxford University and does it in a way that is recognized as viable in the present day Britain. It presents a "figured world," a simplified image that captures what is typical about the people and practices involved in that particular institution. Thus, the discussed excerpts inform about what, as Gee sees it, counts to be "appropriate" to present such a world (2011, 205).

4.2 An analysis of the Exeter University prospectus

The prospectus issued by the University of Exeter is apparently based on the same components and language features but their distribution differs considerably in terms of the order in which they are introduced and their ratios. Firstly, the cover of the document depicts the title which informs of the 50th anniversary of the institution. Next come other promotional elements under the heading "Why students put us first," where the university enumerates places that it has won in some national contests on students' satisfaction or quality of the prospectus. This part also informs about the high ratio of A's among those who apply (85%) and the amount of money invested in the campuses.

What is most striking though is that the section on programmes and courses starts at page 54. It is preceded by a chapter on Student Life, which includes information on campuses in Exeter and Cornwall, as well as comments on sport, music, and wellbeing supplemented with passages on financial support and accommodation costs. These are typical promotional and advertising components characteristic of holiday sites or travel agents' offers. Being foregrounded in the prospectus, they seem to present the university offer as a commodity. It is only in the second chapter entitled Programmes that departments present their courses in detail.

The Archaeology pages, 61 and 62, once again highlight the information visible in the cover about students' satisfaction and prospects and add another important category: their 3rd place in the UK for "world-leading and internationally excellent research." This section apparently serves its promotional functions as it dominates the page through its

size and colour. The text on the course is placed on the right side, in a smaller font. The first paragraph, like in the Oxford prospectus, starts with a metonymic usage of "Archaeology at Exeter," which stresses the authority of both the institution and its course. However, in contrast to the former text, right in the second sentence, the prospective student is addressed by "you", which is over-activated in that particular paragraph and the following ones. Further, personal pronouns "you" and "your" are visible side by side with "we" and "our," which signals the presence of expressive and phatic functions of the text. As Clark et al. (2003, 37) stress, the direct mode of address is adopted to empower the less experienced audience to some action. Besides, such individualised address simulates a conversational and relaxed atmosphere, characteristic of popular media. A careful analysis however informs that the University claims authority over its applicants by putting "we" or "our" in the subject positions.

The informal style of the Exeter text is reinforced with jargon that is not necessarily academic. Side by side with vocabulary typical of any course description, one may encounter colloquialisms, i.e. "lots of contact with staff" and commodity jargon – "our teaching is delivered," "we offer" or "a personal tutor is available." Further, the adjectives used to describe the course itself: "exciting," "vibrant," "relaxing" or "friendly," connote a good holiday offer rather than an institution where work is required. The passages referring to students' assessment and responsibilities seem to go with this mood indicating a good time at the institution. It is achieved by backgrounding the information concerning duties. Instead, agentless passive structures inform that "some modules require assessed essays and projects," or "the practical modules are examined by the preparation of written reports". Furthermore, one sentence informing about the necessary requirements to progress to the second year states that the initial results "do not count towards your final degree classification," which seems to suggest some leniency on candidates' results in their first year.

As in the case of the Oxford prospectus, the Exeter text introduces numerous strong presuppositions concerning students' future employability. The declarative sentences – "our programmes will develop your skills," "you can boost your employability," "it [our programme] gives a strong grounding for a wide range of careers" – appear to cast the potential candidates in the roles of employees. However, the whole text in the Exeter prospectus is much more casual and "consumer" friendly. As Fairclough remarked back in 1993, such strong promotional markers in academic discourse may raise ethical implications. If the language of academia is "colonized" by promotion, it may lead to pathological effects and, consequently, the problem of trust (1993, 142).

Furthermore, the extent to which the Exeter prospectus mixes jargon of educational environment and vocabulary of personal qualities and expectations is not the same. The latter one is far more interdiscursive in its character with higher numbers of features typical of promotional and advertising discourses. Its personalised style puts it closer to the travel agent's materials, where the selling aspect of the "commodity" is clearly visible. What is more, the whole prospectus includes a number of images presenting modern facilities, attractive surroundings and enthusiastic and happy young people. Thus, it may be inferred that the Discourse of Exeter University goes well with the realities of any provincial institution which has to fight harder for its intakes and incomes. Such a situated action, as Gee (2013, 137) calls it, reflects the status and opportunities of a particular institution. It shows what is typical of particular actors and actions in particular sociocultural contexts.

In short, the textual content of both prospectuses seems to reflect the major changes in the academic world and requirements which accord with the way institutions function in this market sector. Their language renders them as more or less significant in the market; informs about the practices they engage in, i.e. attracting students; points to the way both universities build their identity; signals the relationship they have or attempt to have with their audiences (students); conveys academia's perspective on social goods, in this case opportunities to acquire skills and knowledge; helps to build relevant connections between seemingly disconnected things; and finally, indicates how language is used to make certain signs relevant or privileged to create, change or sustain its own usage.

Conclusions

It seems that following a cross-curricular approach to teaching culture can be employed at any instruction level in philological departments, be it culture classes or seminar courses. Pointing to textual features, i.e. its grammar, vocabulary and non-language, enables students to understand what the text really means. Highlighting linguistic features that account for marking texts fosters critical thinking as students observe how particular elements contribute to the presentation of particular issues or events. Furthermore, pointing to the meaning that is determined by multi-semiotic resources such as symbols and visual representation helps in understanding the present day contexts of diverse multimodal communication, which fosters developing future competences that can be transferred from context to context.

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