



The Journal of Asia TEFL

<http://journal.asiatefl.org/>

e-ISSN 2466-1511 © 2004 AsiaTEFL.org. All rights reserved.



Book Review

Introducing Discourse Analysis: From Grammar to Society, by James Paul Gee, London, Routledge, 2018, 170 pp., \$165 (Hardcover), ISBN 978-1-318-29838-5

Introducing Discourse Analysis: From Grammar to Society is an essential textbook for all advanced students of discourse analysis and a reference book for discourse analysts in related areas. This is a successive work of Gee's earlier publications: *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* (Gee, 2014) and *How to Do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit* (Gee, 2014). This book focuses on a 'grammar analysis approach' to discourse analysis, aims "to be clear about the connections between grammar and discourse and even grammar and society, while still showing that discourse analysis goes to places grammar cannot go" (p.1). In this book, Gee argues that speakers and writers convey their ontological beliefs and perspectives through grammar choices, which build social relations and interaction as well as identities. This book offers a new perspective on how discourse analysis can avoid or reduce disputes among different parties, leading to a better understanding between people, and ultimately to a better world.

Divided into nine chapters, Chapter 1 defines grammar as an inherent system with rules in people's minds. Grammar offers people choices to express and interpret. For discourse analysts, understanding the principle of choice making is fundamental. Chapter 2 and 3 use authentic language examples to illustrate grammar patterns that vary in words, structures, and meanings along with different situations, and their changes associated with social cultures. For example, metaphors in English language reflect western values, such as using a money metaphor in describing relationship: "*she invested a lot of time and effort in the relationship* (p.30)".

Chapter 4 explains that the way of people's voice and clause provide choices for language encoding and decoding. The voice and clause patterns form idea units that build a bridge between writers and readers, speakers and hearers. To illustrate, in English language, speakers use stress techniques to differentiate old and new information: "*It's MARY I love, not Sue. or It's Mary I love, not SUE*" (p. 60). Writers use main clauses and subordinate clauses to distinguish the asserted information (foreground) and assumed information (background): "*A white nationalist was bloodied Saturday* (main clause, asserted information) *while confronting protestors at a rally for Donald Trump* (subordinate clause, assumed information)" (p. 64). However, the intentional meaning in a sentence is changeable depending on the context in which it is used. People may interpret the sentence differently according to their social status, culture, knowledge, judgment and situation.

Chapter 5 touches upon the idea that people's identities manifest through language which is manipulated by social and historically activities. For example, experts are differentiated from non-experts by using academic specialist language, which represents their specified identities. These five chapters explicitly present the systematic, social collectivity and coherence features in social language communication.

The following two chapters are devoted to show readers how grammar can be a toolkit for discourse analysis. Chapter 6 and 7 move to the practical side of how to analyze an argument and a narrative using grammar features mentioned in the earliest chapters. Chapter 6 demonstrates how to use intonation units, cohesion markers, such as pronouns, quantifiers, substitution, ellipsis, lexical cohesion, conjunctions and

links, contextualization cues, contrasts to analyze arguments, and how the speaker's identity aligned with others' within a face-to-face conversation. Chapter 7 highlights the importance of narrative in discourse analysis. Narrative is the core method that embodies deeper feelings and meanings by which people express their perspectives of reality. When analyzing narrative data, discourse analysts can form hypotheses to see the situational meanings and views of speakers. Discourse analysts can also investigate the reciprocity between narratives and motifs, thereby acquiring detailed information about one's actual meaning and the "voice" (identity).

Chapter 8 and 9 summarize twelve useful tools for discourse analysis. These tools are 'questions' that could be used by discourse analysts to illuminate the meaning making process, to show how language is constructed and functioning. These questions concern about the nature and facets of identity, social activities, social language, language design, situational meaning, cohesion and grammatical connections, social relationships, political position, individuals' perspectives, and situational and contextual frameworks. For example, discourse analysts could address questions, such as 'What identity or identities are being enacted?', 'What social language or social languages are being used?', 'What sorts of social relationships is the speaker or writer trying to create, sustain, support, change, or tear apart?', and 'What perspectives or viewpoints is the speaker or writer expressing?' (pp.130-131). In any case, an identity should be associated with a given perspective at specific time and specific place. Finally, Gee drew our attention to reflective discussions. He alluded that reflective discussions enable people with different attitudes to discuss a specific issue in a specific context respectfully, as such, people would achieve common goals.

This book could serve as an informative reference. The book pinpoints grammar as unneglectable in social language communication and discusses the possibility of "grammar-utilization" as a tool in discourse analysis. Situating his arguments well within a conceptual framework, Gee maps out the tools and process which serve as variables in doing discourse analysis, as well as the grammar construct, and interpretation from written and oral extracts. He also explores the relationships between grammar, discourse, identity, politics, and society in-depth.

The book is organized in a clear and engaging manner, with authentic written and spoken English language examples, which allow the readers to follow easily. In addition, the book may be particularly useful for people who are familiar with and interested in critical discourse analysis. By assisting readers to understand the nature of a language as a cultural, social, psychological, institutional, and political phenomenon, the book can assist them to examine the interplay between language and identities.

However, this book has some limitations. First, the amount of terminologies in this book may cause readers some difficulty in understanding. For instance, the use of "CWOI," (clause-worth of information, which refers to the implicit or explicit information in a clause) "framework," "conversation and Conversation," (the latter refers to public debate on specific issues such as smoking, abortion, or school reform) and "discourse and Discourse" (the latter refers to the social identities in behaviors and thinking) will require readers to be familiar with the discourse analysis system and structure appearing in the author's earlier work. Dayter (2015) stated that Gee's own brand of discourse analysis terminology overlaps with the traditional terminology of pragmatics which may cause confusion. For instance, Gee's "direct speech acts" aligns with the "explicit speech acts" in traditional terms. Second, the usage of video games and political examples may also pose problems to those who are novice in critical discourse and new literacies. Moreover, since the majority of examples in this book are excerpted from natural English, they may not be as transparent for non-native English speakers. For example, when analyzing the intonation units, non-native English speakers may not recognize the changes of intonation.

Overall, this book reveals the significant role that grammar plays in discourse analysis, providing a valuable insight for socio-linguists, researchers, learners, and discourse analysts. This book is recommended as an informative course book for discourse analysis and related areas.

References

- Dayter, D. (2015). Book review: James Paul Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* and James Paul Gee, *How to Do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit*. *Discourse Studies*, 17(6), 772-774.
- Gee, J. P. (2014). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (4th ed.). London: Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2014). *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit*. London: Routledge.

Sadiq Abdulwahed Ahmed Ismail

Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation for Distinguished Academic Performance
Email: ism232@gmail.com

Xu Liu

Department of Curriculum and Methods of Instruction, College of Education, United Arab Emirates
University,
Email: xulihagen@gmail.com

United Arab Emirates