Discourse Analysis: A Multi-Layered Approach

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Discourse is a complex phenomenon. It includes various sorts of linguistic action, but also non-linguistic social practices. It consists of action and of actors. It entails history, institutions and ideology. Thus, it is far more than a collection of texts (or talk).

How is such a complex phenomenon to be approached? Can it be approached by linguistic means? To which extend can it be approached by linguistic means? Which concrete means do we have – as linguists – for discourse analysis? Which facets of discourse are linguistically under-explored? These are questions the talk addresses. It discusses the variety of methods which are current in linguistic discourse analysis from a methodological point of view, trying to point out their respective potential and their limits, their interrelation and their relation to the complex phenomenon discourse.

In order to do this and to make the complexity a bit more manageable – albeit not less complex –, the talk introduces a methodological model which draws on the thesis that discourse is to be understood as a multi-layered phenomenon and thus requires analysis on multiple layers: the (intra-)textual layer, the layer of social action (or actors), and the trans-textual (discursive) layer. The talk characterizes these layers and the methodological requirements for their analysis, it allocates existing linguistic methods to specific layers (and sub-layers) of discourse, and it tries to point out blind spots of linguistic discourse analysis.

Reference